

REVIEW OF LITERATURE AND ART

Horizon

EDITED BY CYRIL CONNOLLY

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BY V. S. PRITCHETT

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HORIZON

EDITED BY CYRIL CONNOLLY

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CHATTO AND WINDUS

COMMENT

EVERY year around Budget-time appear the inevitable statistics dealing with our expenditure on betting, films, tobacco, alcohol and, occasionally, books. As far as Anglo-Saxons are concerned, it is clear that books, though free of purchase tax, play hardly any part in the Great Escape. Even with their increased cost they register but a paltry gain, and reading—‘that unpunished vice’—remains also one of the least attractive. Yet for an outlay of five shillings a week (less than half the sum expended by the addict of barley or tobacco) many a lily-livered refugee from the Pink Bliss, the Red Devil, or the Blue Boredom, gluing his eye to the print, can footle through life in a benevolent daze.

This neglect of letters is a result of bad advertising. If we compare the inducements to buy beer or cigarettes with the advertisements for books, we find that, while the first two are based on the pleasure principle, the last concentrates on uplift. Publishers insist on elevating when they should be parading the essential agreeable uselessness of the written word. Listening to the Portuguese *fados* Beckford wrote, ‘You think you are drinking milk but all the time the poison of voluptuousness is stealing through your veins’. That is how we would have you look at HORIZON, and to the occasional reader who still complains that it is ‘above his head’ we would add that to bumble around half understanding and half not, in a maze of useless information, is in itself a bewildering and quite fatuous pleasure. And what escapes we offer: Italy, Teneriffe, England a hundred year’s hence in the last number; two new poets and the Spanish Cloister in the present. Escapes in time and in place, and through a new series, ‘Studies in Genius’, a glimpse of the great Visitors’ Book where the human spirit has left its signature with the timeless best of which it is capable.

Yet if I were Chancellor of this—or indeed any other country—with what horror and despair would I view the human situation! Forty-six million people every year more unhappy, more discontented with their lot—spendthrift flies crawling towards the sun, ready to pay any sum for the weed that calms anxiety, the liquids that generate illusions and oblivion, paying out fortunes in betting which means buying the right to daydreams of yet more alcohol and nicotine or still untaxed sensual pleasures, flocking to

the cinema to see what Hollywood considers best for them; a people (like most others) whose pleasures are both vicarious and sterile; not constructive play-therapy but a monotonous alleviation of pain and boredom. When one considers as well the emigration and would-be emigration figures the picture of desolation seems complete. While we smugly christen the present 'The Atomic Age', the statisticians (if any) of the future may rather describe ours as the age of alcohol or trace our changeover from the ancient standard of gold to the new currency of the cigarette, while noting playfully how the modern State, which is responsible for the happiness of those who compose it, draws an increasing revenue from their misery. A more profound moralist would add that smoking increases in proportion to the strain of modern life, drinking in proportion to its monotony; in both we take a vegetable revenge on the machine which robs the worker of the pleasure of craftsmanship and sets a standard of efficiency (the telephone, or traffic lights) with which ordinary humans cannot compete. Descending deeper still he would find that the advance of the opiates is characteristic of the terrible transitional epoch in which we live, a generation which has destroyed God and not known how to create Man.

Man without God is immensely lonely: we should treat everyone alive today as a friend on his deathbed or the inmate of a condemned cell. The Americans have a society called 'Alcoholics Anonymous' (great revenue producers, I imagine) who rally to each other's side when a bout is due: were 'Human Beings Anonymous' with its motto 'we must love one another and die' ever to get on its feet, we might experience a new world in which budgets were unbalanceable, where people enjoyed their work, where men were not sick under lampposts, and women didn't cough, and where a magazine like *HORIZON* was as desirable as a packet of Churchman, or a stick of gum.

WALDEMAR HANSEN

THE BEAST IN THE JUNGLE

The vanity of melodrama bent
Indifference to pseudo-love, as spoons
Appear to bend in water. And the hunt
Ended, turned end to the means,
Lashing this love with conjured tropic rains.
Fury, gratuitous, cut through
The jungle where the cockatoo
Sat screaming at the boa winding to the noon.

Like jungle savage, I wore my painted mask
For jungle-rites, and beat the bushes where
Fictitious tiger waited for the dusk
To call him from his lair,
And snarled as hunter's prodding made him stir.
Though he is not a daylight beast
The beater's madness will assist
To draw him into daylight for a daylight roar.

I am all to myself: witch-doctor, native,
Tiger and beater. Drums of artifice
Pound day and night in constant recitative,
Transmitting each mordant kiss.
Hidden behind the code, my cicatrice
Looms and proclaims the deepest wounds
Are unimportant: ritual bends
These artless tortures to a magnificent mask of a face.

PETER VIERECK
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‘THE two young ladies separated. Juliette, who wanted to become a grand lady, how could she consent to be accompanied by a girl whose virtuous and plebeian inclinations might dishonour her social prestige? And Justine, for her part, how could she expose her good name to the companionship of a perverse creature who was looking forward to a life of vile lewdness and public debauchery? They bade each other an eternal adieu, and next morning they both left the convent.’—MARQUIS DE SADE, *Justine, or The Misfortunes of Virtue*, 1791.

I

The sick man, though, had wit who thought you up.
Who can not picture you that fatal morning?
Homeless, not even knowing where you'll sup,
You sigh, 'Adieu!' and ask yourselves, 'What next?'
I sound like old Polonius—don't be vexed
If I give too avuncular a warning;
But having scanned your futures in a text,
I gasp at all the ways you'll be misled
(Your nuns behind you and your males ahead)
And want to save you from your author's plot.
When he says, 'Follow me,' you'd better not!

II

Justine, by all means do be virtuous
But not in so provocative a fashion.
I'm being frank; please listen: solely thus
Can you elude that lamentable passion
For which your author lends his name to us.
The night he ties you down in Bondy Wood,
You'll learn what happens to the gauchely good.

III

Yet you'll endure, Justine. Most stubbornly!
To love mankind, to preach tranquillity
To Etna or reverse a spinning planet
By bleating trustfully your Pauline tracts—
Such supernatural smugness is sheer granite:
No, not eroded by whole cataracts
Of fondlers groping through—beyond—your body

To sate in flesh the spirit's old distress
 And plunge their seekings in some final sea.
 Meanwhile, far off, a certain chic Grand Lady
 Half-hears a voice each night (too kind for spleen)
 That weeps for all her daytime wilfulness:
*'Juliette! Juliette! What have you done to me?
 It's I—your other self—your poor Justine.'*

IV

And you, Juliette: have fun while doing ill.
 Be un-immaculate *while yet you may*
 (I drop this hint to give the plot away).
 But when you dance with sweating stable-lads
 Or tired Dukes who giggle at your skill,
 Don't think it's you who dance; the ghosts of gods
 Who died before our oldest gods were young,
 Twirl savagely in your polite salon:

That sofa where reclining comes so easy,
 Is far more haunted than you'll ever guess.
 Your lips raise shrines as mystic as Assisi
 From whiteness they so piously caress.
 O you are very wise (your playful nights,
 That seem so casual, are primordial rites)
 And very silly (promise me you'll stay
 A pretty little girl who'll never spell
'Chthonic' nor learn her Freud too sadly well).
 Last week I think I met you on Broadway.

V

Two truths, two sisters. An obsessive pair:
 Serene in their unalterable roles
 Whether their frantic author flog or kiss them.
 And either truth rebukes our limbo where
 Girls are not Bad but merely Indiscreet,
 Girls are not Good but merely Very Sweet,
 And men are filed in their own filing-system
 With frayed manila-folders for their souls—
 Once labelled GOD'S OWN IMAGE: USE WITH CARE
 But now reclassified as OBSOLETE.

VI

Justine ! Juliette ! We need you, both of you,
 'Girls of mild silver or of furious gold'.
 Revoke your spat ; it is our own feud, too.
 You smile ? Yet you can bless us if you will.
 And then—and then—identities unveiled,
 Tall tales rehearsed and poutings reconciled—
 Two opposites will find each other
 And sob for half a day together ;
 For heaven and hell are childhood playmates still.

V. S. PRITCHETT

ARTHUR KOESTLER

BETWEEN imaginative writing and journalism the distinction is easy to make ; but in some periods the critic is not required to refine on it. In the nineteenth century the readers of Dickens or Dostœvski could see the journalism of these writers at a glance, and could without difficulty snip an editorial on the Poor Law, or a feature article on the Russian soul and its need to occupy Constantinople, from the imaginative pages. The readers of great European journalists like Herzen, Engels and, in our own time, Trotsky, were in no danger of mistaking these writers for artists in an important sense, for artists towered above them. Today the relation has changed. It is generally agreed that the last decade has been unpropitious for the imaginative writer and that the distinguished work of our years has been fragmentary and small in compass ; and as the imaginative writer has receded, so the journalist has advanced. It is he who has towered and glowered over the obstreperous, overgrown child of events ; and it becomes necessary once more to mark his difference from the creative writer. The task is delicate because the distinction may be thought invidious. It is not, for many imaginative writers have been journalists in the last decade and with every advantage to the range of their interests and their talent. The digestive process of journalism is coarser than that of art, and we have lived through a period when a coarse digestion became indispensable. The journalist has had the task of accommodating violence to the private stomach and of domesticating the religious, revolutionary

and national wars in the private conscience. He has been the intermediary between our private and public selves and, in doing this office, has become a hybrid and representative figure, the vacillating and tortured Hamlet expressing our common disinclinations and our private guilt. For it is typical of the contemporary journalist that his case history goes with him. Like Hamlet, he travels with his court of private disasters, his ghosts, his Ophelias, even his Rosencrantz and Guildenstern; and though we may often think the sight ridiculous, we must give him the credit for attempting the creation of a new kind of first person singular, a new hero, who can 'take' the assaults of de-civilization, who has invented a certain style which enables him to face the spectacle of mass suffering and official medievalism, with passion, stoicism and humanity. To him the style is as important as the humanity; and, eventually, we may be sure that artists will collect his vestiges, as once they eagerly collected the sacred relics of Byronism.

To the journalism and the reporting of the higher kind the work of Arthur Koestler is a copious guide. He is not at the level of Malraux or Silone, for he lacks the hard self-control of the Frenchman, the fierce brain and luminous sensibility of the Italian. Koestler's gift is bold and fresh, but it is theatrical. He is the declaiming and compelling actor. No one has known better than he when to drop what he is doing and rush to document the latest convulsion. In this fashion, he has run through the political infections of our generation; through Marxism, Leninism, anti-Stalinism; and practice has accompanied theory. He has known and documented the political prisons and torture houses. He has belonged to the class described in his book *The Scum of the Earth*, the human wreckage of the Left which Fascism scattered over Europe. How much in his writing is personal experience and how much is an intense imaginative identification with the people he describes, is not important; or rather, only the identification is important. It is passionate because it is moral; it is complex because it is at once theatrical and aware of itself. There are other qualities: Koestler is more than a simple reporter. He is intellectually volatile; it is second nature for him to generalize about events; he is politically trained, and likes to be politically bespattered. It is the business of the journalist to interview everything and Koestler is able to interview philosophy, science, economics, history, and to come back with a notebook full of general ideas

which are put to dramatic use. For the rest, the traits of the profession are emphasized in him by his lack of roots. He was born a displaced person: half-Hungarian, half-Jew, he was educated in Vienna, worked in Germany and Palestine, lived in France. He has been created to wander without mundane allegiances. His allegiances were always to the world of ideas or myth; and when these failed, to the world of random physical events. Guilt and self-pity have been the price. With some exceptions—Strindberg is one—imaginative writers appear to allay their neuroses in works of art; but the neuroses of the journalist are exacerbated by his special opportunities for seeing life.

Yet definitions like these do not bring Koestler into the intimate scope of the English critic. He is separated from us by the education and the politics of the Continent, by the vast difference between the large, stable middle-class in England and the small, precarious middle-class of Central Europe. He can easily dazzle us because we have no café conversation and no café writers. We have no skill in playing poker with ideas. We are not trained to pretend that things which are entirely different may (for the pleasure of effect) be assumed to be opposites. We have no eternal students. We have no intelligentzia. These differences have led Koestler himself to as complete and conventional misreading of English life as any that have been done by Continental writers. (See *The Yogi and the Commissar*.) We must assume that our judgement of him will suffer from similar difficulties of contact.

We come nearest to him in *Scum of the Earth*. This is partly because the book is a personal record of the events at the fall of France where, at last, English experience came close to the experience of the Continent. A second reason is that here Koestler has cleaned his slate and is putting down just what he saw and heard and, with emotion, is pulling down the curtain on a period. This report is alive; it is packed with human beings; it is resilient and almost buoyant. He is in his natural element, or rather in one of his natural elements: anarchy and disillusion. His eyes are skinned for every incident as, sombre and sardonic—but not with detachment—he notes down the fates of his friends. This book (and *The Gladiators*) contains his least opaque writing.

But we first heard of Koestler in *The Spanish Testament* and here a play is beginning, not coming to an end. We see the sullen sky over Vigo harbour glowing 'under an evil spell'. It is the

Koestler spell. We are in for melodrama. 'The constriction in the throat that affects a whole town, a whole population, like an epidemic': as in the theatre, generalizations, simplifications. The characters wear the make-up of revolution. This writer does not appear to know Spanish history, but he knows current Marxism. He is briefed. He is in control, and can switch on and off when effects are needed. Sardonic anger, raw humour and the punctures of anthropological inquiry let the wind out of his hysterical passages at the right moment. All this is good journalism, but compared, say, with Borkenau on Spain, it is slapdash. Koestler was a smatterer, and the only thing of value that emerged was personal: *The Dialogue with Death*. There have been finer, more sensitive, more humane and more objective accounts of life in Spanish prisons than Koestler's, for Koestler had to be the leading actor, and he writes with one wall of the prison down; but the attempt at a personal revelation is intellectually impressive, and precisely in the study of hysteria which elsewhere in his writing is his least attractive quality. In the end, when the curtain goes down in *The Spanish Testament* we are not entirely convinced or convicted. Perhaps because we have been over-convinced. The impression remains after other books by Koestler. Against ourselves must be put his strongest card: he has had to combat the English unwillingness to face the appalling facts of medieval atrocity on the Continent.

Yet this may not be the explanation of our uneasiness. The source may be literary: Koestler has a voice, an urgent voice, vital, voluble and lively, above all never boring—a voice, but an arid and mechanical style. On the face of it this is an unkind criticism to make of a displaced writer who is not writing in his own tongue, who has to make shift to write our own and has mastered it. But we suspect that no language is an inconvenience to him; language is a machine; not even in his own language, we feel, has he any love of words or any sense of their precision and grace. Here is a passage from *The Yogi and the Commissar*, and I think the manner itself forbids belief in the argument, and leaves us with the sensation that Koestler himself would only half-believe in it if he could express it simply, for it is only half-true: 'The law of the novel-perspective prescribes that it is not enough for the author to create "real life", he must also locate its geometrical place in a co-ordinate system, the axes of which are

represented by the dominating facts, ideas, and tendencies of his time; he must fix its position in an n -dimensional space-time continuum. The real Sylvia spins around the centre of a narrow family-vortex of conditioning factors, whereas the author, in promoting her to novel life, places her in the centre of a vortex formed by the great trade winds, typhoons, depressions, and hurricanes of her time. Of course he need not describe or even mention them. But implicitly they must be there.'

Koestler uses words as thought-saving gadgets from the iron-mongery counter, and draws especially on the vocabulary of science and economics which is paralysed by patents. Like the Latin tag, they may appeal to the vanity; and the Central European mind appears to be susceptible to technical coagulations, but neither exactitude nor pleasure issues from them. The love of jargon suggests the lack of an instinct or a sense, and suggests deaf and arbitrary nature.

The deficiency is more damaging to Koestler's reporting than to his earliest novels. Shaky as some passages in *The Gladiators* are—it was his first 'English' novel, and, presumably, a translation—they are pretty free of vices of style. The jargon of Marx, Freud, Einstein, would have been grotesque in a story of ancient Rome and the Spartacus revolt. We are captured at once in this novel by the sardonic vivacity of the author, the raciness of his reporting, his light mastery of the novelist's and historian's material, even by his boyish humour. We also feel a quality which is rare in the melodramas that come after: the sense of the human tragedy and a pity that is truly pitched and moving. That feeling for tragedy is never recovered, and in my opinion *The Gladiators* is his most impressive book. No personal hatred, no extraneous obsession with persecution or guilt, clutters the running of the narrative, or impedes the growth of the argument: for though the matter of the Trotsky-Stalin conflict is present in the chapter on 'the law of detours' and is implicit in the main crisis of the book, Koestler has not yet projected himself into the Moscow trials. Success destroys: the revolutions that fail preserve their myth; and to Koestler faith and myth are everything. Another reason for Koestler's excellence in this book is that it has a settled subject, set in the remote past, and history has agreed on it. By gift a reporter, he is a hundred times better in recording what is given than in contriving imaginatively what is not;

with him, controversy simply brings out the 'old soldier' of the clinics.

The subject of *The Gladiators* is the rising of the slaves under Spartacus, their race to triumph; the tragic split with Crixus, and the final defeat. On the one hand the laxity and shamelessness, the experience and corruption of Rome are comically and diversely rendered with a ribaldry and a talker's scholarship that recall the early Aldous Huxley. These Roman portraits are plump and impudent medallions, cheerfully unclassical; they are the footnotes of Gibbon turned into agreeable and scabrous cartoons. On the other hand is the raw, rushing, high-voiced rebellion, tearing down the roads, laughing, shouting, guzzling, raping, killing. The wings of the traditional humane ideal raise riot above its own lusts; the brotherhood of the camp makes the spirit flesh. There is a pity for the mindless hopes and follies of simple people: this is the only book of Koestler's to show us the lowly material of revolution, the simple man who, even in his excess, does not wish to die, and whose last look, as he falls, is of surprise. (In the later books, the dying of the revolutionary leaders has lost all human quality; it has become a transaction of policy.) The masses in *The Gladiators* are incapable of salvation, and between the Gadarene downrush which Crixus will lead, and the slow, painful political course for which the mind of Spartacus is pathetically groping, they chose the former. Spartacus, who cannot stand the screams of his own prisoners, is overwhelmed by the necessity of being a tyrant. He parts company with half his horde; objectively he ought to have killed them.

We feel the earth under our feet in this book, and whether or not it has the developed qualities of a novel is not important. In fact, it is a collection of brilliantly placed episodes, linked by a commentary; and growing characters are not required. (This is fortunate, because it turns out in his later work that Koestler has little power to create or sustain large characters.) All that is required in this book is that his pictures of people shall have instantaneous physical reality—Spartacus himself needs very little to fix him in our mind's eye—and that the atmosphere and the feeling, shall be actual like the news. The best of Koestler is in a passage like the following on the fate of the Praetor; and the end of the passage indicates where Koestler goes wrong: 'On foot—for his horse had been left with the robbers—the bald-headed

Praetor Clodius Glaber climbed down into the plain. He had been separated from his fleeing soldiers, and walked through the night, alone. He strayed from the trodden path, stumbled over the crooked, stony edge of a vineyard, looked around. The vineyard, studded with pointed stakes, looked like a graveyard by the stars' light. It was very quiet; bandits and Vesuvius dimmed to unreality, Rome and Senate were blotted out; yet one more deed asked to be done. He opened his cloak, felt the place with his fingers, gently pressed the sword-point to it.

'The deed asked to be done, but it was only now he understood its full meaning. Little by little the point must be driven home; little by little it must tear through tissue, cut tendons and muscles, splinter the ribs. Not till then the lung is reached, tender, mucous, thinly veined; it must be ripped asunder. Now a slimy shell, and now the heart itself, a bulbous bag of blood—its touch beyond imagination. Had ever a man accomplished this? Well he might, with a sudden thrust, perhaps. But once you knew of the process and every one of its stages, you would never be able to do it.

"Death" up to now a word like any other, seemed removed into unattainable distance. All the relatives of Death, such as Honour, Shame and Duty, exist for him only who has no ken of reality. For reality, mucous, unspeakably delicate, with its mesh of thin veins, is not made to be torn to bits by some pointed object. And now Praetor Clodius Glaber knows that dying is unutterably stupid—more stupid still than life itself.

'He realizes that his shoes are full of pebbles. He sits down on a stone and empties the shoes; he observes that the pebbly discomfort had been a responsible element of his despair. As compared to the ignominious defeat of his army, the sharp little pebbles—seven in all—admittedly shrink into ridiculous insignificance. But how can you sift the important from the unimportant if both speak to your senses with equal vehemence? His tongue and palate are still covered with the stale taste of interrupted sleep; a few forgotten grapes lurk between the vines. He plucks a few, looks around; only the stars are witnessing the curious sequence of his actions, and their sight is no rebuke to him.

'He feels ashamed and yet he must admit that his actions are in no way senseless; no amount of philosophy can alter the fact that grapes were made to be eaten. Besides, he has never before enjoyed grapes as much. He sips their juice together with the

tears of an unexplained emotion. He smacks his lips with defiance and shame.

'And night with the lights of its indifferent stars gave as a further knowledge unto Praetor Clodius Glaber: all pleasure, not only defined versions of it, and Life itself, are based on age-old, secret shamelessness.'

Why can't these central Europeans learn when to stop? The myth of 'age-old, secret, shamelessness'! Not *another* myth, we exclaim, not a new thesis, a new antithesis, a new synthesis.

The real core of Koestler's thought in *The Gladiators*—it is taken up again in a moving passage towards the end of his latest book *Thieves in the Night*—is in the words of the Essene to Spartacus:

"Prophecies are never worth anything," said the Essene. "I explained that before, but in the meantime you've been asleep. Prophecies do not count, he who receives them counts."

'Spartacus lay in thought, his eyes open.

"He who receives them will see evil days," he said after a while.

"Aye," said the Essene. "He'll have a pretty rotten time."

"He who receives them", said Spartacus, "will have to run and run, on and on, until he foams at the mouth and until he has destroyed everything in his way with his great wrath. He'll run and run, and the Sign won't let go of him, and the demon of wrath will tear through his entrails."

Spartacus listens to the Essene through the night, until the sky lightens: 'The Black shadows in his eye sockets had, as it were, evaporated. . . . Spartacus looked again at the glowing East and at the mountain whose everyday shape gradually broke the spell of its nightly distortion.'

Night, dawn, noon, the spell: the symbols are theatrical.

Spartacus fails, but now the dawn has come; we are moving towards the success at Noon, the darkness at Noon which is the corruption of success. This is an ancient and haunting Jewish theme. The Race, by numberless pronouncements of Jehovah, has been fated to be destroyed in success, to be searching for ever.

Darkness at Noon is a *tour de force*, a book terrifying and claustrophobic, an intellectual thriller. The efficiency, the speed, the smooth order of the narrative as it runs fast to its end, are extraordinary. Here is the story of a man arguing his way (or being argued)

towards the confession of crimes he has not committed, an interpretation of the Moscow trials, a dramatized examination of the problem of ends and means. As a novelist, Koestler has a superb gift for the handling of argument in a living way; he knows when to break off, when to slip into the personal or the small incident, when to digress into the minor character, where to tighten the screw. Rubashov, the accused, makes the pace all through the story; he is an alert, intelligent man, a brain, where Spartacus was passive. And occasionally, like a sudden fragment of sunlight in this grey and horrifying book, horrifying in its grim pistol-barrel logic, moments of human illumination occur in Rubashov. They are moving. But when all praise is given, *Darkness at Noon* remains a melodrama. Rubashov and Gletkin are a sad pair of Jesuits consumed and dulled as human beings by their casuistry. The Communists have taken over the doctrine of original sin from the Roman Catholic Church, and have tacked the Calvinist doctrine of Predestination on to it; but they have dispelled the visionary and emotional quality of these dogmas, with the dull acrimony of the makers of company bye-laws. An irredeemable dreariness surrounds the lives of Rubashov and Gletkin. They are not 'great'; they are merely committee men or chess players.

The book is not tragedy. Yet to be destroyed by your own church or by your own beliefs ought to be tragic. It is surely tragic for the young to destroy the old. There were (if Koestler had not been so gifted in the art of making a case) tragic springs in Rubashov's history. Somewhere in the tale, Ivanov (one of the Inquisitors who is drugging himself with drink) remarks that the murders of Raskolnikov were trivial because they served, or failed to serve, private ends; had they served the ends of the collective morality, they would have been significant. But in *Darkness at Noon* the official killing of Rubashov to serve the collective end fails to reach this high standard. It is a police act, not a tragedy, the end of a case. Koestler could reply that the casuistry of Gletkin & Co. has destroyed the concept of tragedy on the collective plane; but the casuistry is Koestler's. Rubashov, who has betrayed so many people in the name of 'objectivity', has destroyed himself in advance, and is simply getting what is coming to him. By inference, the same will happen to Gletkin. The two rascals are agreed. Wolf, as the Tsarist officer says, eats

wolf. Great ideas are in conflict, but in this book they are not embodied in great men.

We have to turn to the greatest of all novels about the revolutionary, Dostoevski's *The Possessed*, to see that *Darkness at Noon* is a powerful book, but not an imaginative work of the highest kind. It has the intensity of obsession, the interest of surgery, but no largeness. It is a document, pulled up by the roots from a native soil. The revolutionaries of *The Possessed* are living people with biographies, and they are set among other living people. Russia breathes in Dostoevski's novel, its landscape, its towns, its climate, its history, and grants them the pardon of time and place. For it is evident, from our post-war contacts with them, that the Russians are as Dostoevski drew them: a people living by wont in a natural atmosphere of suspicion and mistrust, and consumed by fantasies. *The Possessed* is soaked in its own people, grows out of Russian soil. It is felt.

Compared with *The Possessed*, *Darkness at Noon* grows out of nowhere. It is allegory. Yet even the Party is not the same in all countries, and the problem of ends and means is decided not by moralists, but by temperament, feeling, tradition. The objection to *Darkness at Noon* is not that it has overstated its case, but that it has stated only a case; the book understates its field of human, psychological and historical reference. Koestler's own mind is like a prison, with its logical corridors, its dazzling but monotonous lighting, the ingenious disposition of its control towers, its traverses and walls. And there are also the judas slots through which we are led to observe the sudden, shocking, physical revelation; those cells from which the bangings of hysteria break out and those silent cells where the dingy human being stands in his day dream; and, outside, the courtyard where the man circles, dragging his shame in his scraping feet. No normal emotion, no love above all, can be felt there, but only the self-love and self-hatred of the prisoner. And Koestler, who occupies this prison, is like some new and enterprising prison governor, humane enough, but more and more attached to the place and infected with the growing belief that the guilty are ourselves, the free, the people outside. This is a position he shares with the Communist intellectuals of his generation. Their habit of hypnotizing and magnetizing a subject by the incantations of repetitive argument, so that it becomes rigid, is his. *Darkness at Noon* might be called

a major act of literary hypnosis. And the argument is so successful and complete that we begin ceasing to believe in its human application the moment we put the book down.

After *Darkness at Noon* there is a decline. The tight organization of Koestler's gifts goes slack. Disillusion brought his power to a climax; and since then he has descended to nihilism. *Arrival and Departure* is an attack upon belief itself, due to an unfortunate encounter with psycho-analysis: 'If one wanted to explain why Peter had behaved as he did, one had to discard from the beginning his so-called convictions and ethical beliefs. They were mere pretexts of the mind, phantoms of a more intimate reality. It did not matter whether he was a hero of the Proletariat or a martyr of the Catholic Church; the real clue was this suspect craving for martyrdom.' More accurately, this book is Koestler's attack upon himself as a member of the small middle-class intelligentsia of the Continent, and it ends by justifying isolation. The Cause has been thrown over and humanity goes with it. Koestler appears to have had a theatrical view of faith; it was a vision, not a bond. By a really crass misreading of Freud the neuroses of the revolutionaries are made to cancel the traditions of humanitarianism, indeed any strivings of the mind. The civilized, the believing and creating mind is dismissed. Peter solves his conflicts by refusing to recognize one side of them, and after he has exploded his beliefs goes off to fight nevertheless because 'reasons do not matter'. Intellectually a rotten book, it has all the old skill in story-telling, the old lack of acceptable characters; an incapacity to describe love—love equals lust, etc.—but a terrifying power to describe torture. The effect is overpowering. One could do with the old framework of good and evil to hold this picture in, and the framework existed if Koestler had cared to recognize it. The despised liberal English and Americans of the ordinary kind were impelled to fight and destroy the nation which committed these atrocities. Koestler's atrocities appear to have been taken out of the moral scheme and to have become pornographic. He is like Ivanov in *Darkness at Noon*, who said that ever since the invention of the steam engine, there has been no normality, only war. A remark that is deeply untrue. There is always normality. *Arrival and Departure* shows those vices of style—the use of jargon—which have marked his essays, and the psycho-analysis is too *voulu* for words.

With his last book, *Thieves in the Night*, Koestler returns to something nearer the mood of *The Gladiators*, and his ambivalent attitude to violence—and to ends and means—is almost decided. He has come full circle, i.e. he is *very nearly* prepared to justify violence; or rather he has quite decided to throw out justification. He is among the people whom he really envies and admires, the violent people, the people with grenades in their lorries. This is an old legacy from Communism; one can see it in Malraux also. If anything, Koestler is more depressed by the Zionists' capacity as colonists than by their readiness for killing; practical capacity has no Byronism. We have the suspicion that the Neanderthals of *Darkness at Noon* are being reproduced in the Promised Land. Can it be that the inhabitants of Utopias are always dull and muttonish: 'I have watched them ever since they arrived—these stumpy, dumpy girls with their rather coarse features, big buttocks and heavy breasts, physically precocious, mentally retarded, over-ripe and immature at the same time; and these raw arse-slapping youngsters, callow, dumb and heavy, with their aggressive laughter and unmodulated voices, without traditions, manners, form, style. . . .

'Their parents were the most cosmopolitan race of the earth—they are provincial and chauvinistic. Their parents were sensitive bundles of nerves with awkward bodies—their nerves are whips and their bodies those of a horde of Hebrew Tarzans roaming in the hills of Galilee. Their parents were intense, intent, overstrung, over-spiced—they are tasteless, spiceless, unleavened and tough. Their parents were notoriously polyglot—they have been brought up in one language which had been hibernating for twenty centuries before being brought artificially back to life. . . . But the Joseph of *Thieves in the Night* has found what Peter of *Arrival and Departure* had defined as a psychological aberration: a Cause. More than a Cause: something that none of the Koestler characters has ever had—the lack is their fatal weakness in debate, a nutritional deficiency of Marxist teaching—a country. It is the embryo country, the almost theoretical country of Zionism, but still a country. In his youth, Koestler had lived for a time in the Jewish communities of Palestine, but had, for some reason, tired of them and left; now, once violence has arisen, his personal interest and his alert journalist eye for the topical story have been stirred. The truth is, of course, that he is cosmopolitan and

European; that is his real virtue politically; he sees the interaction and unity of European events, and this rational attitude is clearly in conflict with his new Faith, and so much so that scepticism, detachment, the yearning not to be committed is the impression that still survives the rifle shots and the Hallelujahs. Such a conflict makes an excellent basis for Koestler's best vein: his talk, and this book has some readable passages. 'Joseph looked round the terrace and sighed. The khamsin lay on people's faces like a spasm. The women were plump, heavy-chested, badly and expensively dressed. The men sat with sloping shoulders and hollow chests, thinking of their ulcers. Each couple looked as if they were carrying on a quarrel under cover of the *Merry Widow*.

"I can't blame the gentiles if they dislike us," he said.

"That proves you are a patriot," said Matthews. "Since the days of your prophets, self-hatred has been the Jewish form of patriotism."

Joseph wiped his face. The khamsin was telling on him. He felt sick of it all: Judaism, Hebraism, the whole cramped effort to make something revive which had been dead for two thousand years.

"It is all very well for you to talk as a benevolent outsider," he said. "The fact is, we are a sick race. Tradition, form, style, have all gone overboard. We are a people with a history but no background. . . . Look around you, and you'll see the heritage of the ghetto. It is there in the wheedling lilt of the women's voices, and in the way the men hold themselves, with that frozen shrug about their shoulders."

"I guess that shrug was their only defence. Otherwise the whole race would have gone crackers." The possibility that the terrorists are really Fascist or copying Fascist methods raises the old bugbear about ends and means, and these discussions are boring.

The central figure, narrator and diarist of this report is now, for the first time, English, an English half-Jew. A naïve snobbery is disclosed here; he belongs to that romantic idol of the Continent, the English country gentry. It is the Disraeli touch. The consequence is that when this character goes to Palestine, he has a low social opinion of the British ruling class who do not come out of the top drawer. One lady—imagine it—has an official position and yet is only the wife of a sergeant. The only real 'lady' is an agreeable sketch, but women have always to be punished in

Koestler's novels, and she is made to go through a boring official dinner when afflicted by her periods. Koestler's attitude to sex has always been neurotic—least in *The Gladiators*—and, in one of his articles, he threatens to raise the question of the menarche, no doubt as a new myth in the space-time continuum.

Bedevilled by his journalistic habit of treating differences as opposites—it makes a brighter page—Koestler can only draw the Jewish colonists with ironical sympathy and vigour, by covering the Arabs and the English with ridicule.

As we ourselves—see *Passage to India*, George Orwell, etc.—have a robust tradition of satire at the expense of our own people, Koestler's looks thin and conventional; the attack on the Arabs, since it is rarely done in English, is fresher, but historically silly. All the same, the bias of the book works to its advantage as a piece of reporting, but only in the first half, that is, say, up to the rape of the girl Dina. The narrative is brisk and dramatic, the picture of the colony is in full colour, the description of its way of living tolerant and moving. We see an Old Testament world; but argued, of course, and enlivened by Koestler's short, snorting, schoolboy humour. After the rape—and rape or lust without love is a special interest of Koestler's, down to fundamentals: strip the pretences, debunk, be honest, away with liberal and *petit bourgeois* prevarications in the bedroom—after the rape, suspiciously enough, the novel disintegrates, wanders around, and Koestler's doubts appear. The story ends in 1939, which is very lucky for the Anglo-Jewish hero who, in any case, is going to be violent, not with bombs after all, but with a wireless station.

One new quality appears in *Thieves in the Night*; an interest in landscape. The descriptions of Galilee are imaginative. Koestler's talent has always been for the hard, surprising, physical image that stamps a person, a crowd, a place on the mind; and now he is extending this poetic interest to places. It brings an amenity up to now uncommon in his work. We welcome it for in his intense and strung-up work there have been no points of rest; the vice of the 'dynamic' conception of life is that it does not record the consolations of inertia, and never contemplates a beautiful thing. His attempts consciously to inject beauty have ended in the sentimental.

Thieves in the Night is an improvement on *Arrival and Departure*, but it represents the coarsening and mechanization of a talent.

One looks back upon his novels. What is the final impression? They are not novels: they are reports, documentaries, briefs, clinical statements, animated cartoons of a pilgrim's regress from revolution. They are material, formative material: their opponents, as well as their disciples, are formed by them. The effect is hypnotic. It is a paradox that these lively and fast-moving books are, at a second glance, not moving at all. Koestler has fixed them, made them static; it is he with his 'case' who is on the move; the story and the people do not move of themselves at all. Our eye is following him and not them. The result is that, underlying the superficial excitement, a bored sensation of unbelief is built up—why read about people who merely illustrate an argument and are foils for the author? Quickly the people recede before the inevitable half-truths of a magnetizing talker with a good conceit of himself; and while he rarely makes a dull remark, he also rarely makes one that common experience does not flatly contradict. And yet the confidence with which Koestler grasps important themes makes the continued privacy of the English novel look eccentric. It commonly has been eccentric, but at any rate we have no novelist of the social or public conscience who has Koestler's scope or force—no journalist or reporter either. It is the price we pay for our lack of interest in general ideas for their own sake; empiricism is not dramatic. General ideas become, however, an infatuation; for example, it may be that the Soviet runs a police State, forced labour camps, etc., because Russia has always had these things, and not because of a specific ethical lapse. It may be that Koestler has imposed a Central European efficiency upon the Russian scene in *Darkness at Noon*. Perhaps the English novelist is wise to avoid general ideas and to stick to life as it is presented to himself, and to leave what he doesn't know to the newspapers and the Blue books. For the novels of Koestler are skeletal. They are like the steel frameworks of modern buildings before the bricks go in; and up there, shaking all over with the vibration of the thing, is Koestler furiously concentrating on his pneumatic riveter. A guilty figure: he can't quite get over an old wish that it was a machine-gun and the principle is maddeningly similar. So guilty does he feel that presently he stops work, harangues the crowd below, and the building is never completed. It remains, a stimulus, an incitement to others, an imposing outline against the sky.

ELEANOR CLARK

HURRY, HURRY!

NO one was there when the house began to fall. It was a beautiful June day, warmer than it had been. I remember that people had been particularly expansive that morning as after a thunderstorm. They had gathered on the porch steps at mailtime, exclaiming over and over on the warmth of the sun and the colour of the tiger lilies that had just sprung out all over town. One of the ladies, receiving a long-awaited letter from her nephew, had suddenly become very witty and kissed everyone in the store, and this could never have happened on an ordinary day. Naturally it occurred to no one that a disaster was about to take place.

The only creature that might have given some warning was the French poodle, *de Maupassant*, who had been locked in the house and should have sensed that everything was not quite right, but he gave no sign of life until the end. Probably my mother had spoiled him too much by that time. Certainly she loved the dog, especially since the accident that paralysed one of his paws, so that it was hard for her to deny him anything. People laughed at her for this, and she laughed at herself, but she could always find something in him to excuse her behaviour. She loved the aristocracy of him, the way he tossed his luxurious black mane—*Louis Quatorze* she called it—or drew his shoulders a little together and pointed up his slender glossy snout. In the evening he snuggled at her feet, and then, though in the daytime her profile was too sharp and her green-flecked eyes leapt too quickly to the defence, there was something almost of a madonna in my mother's face. But she had spoiled the dog. In the end he was incapable of serious thought and must have played or slept through the whole catastrophe. The servant spent most of his time writing love letters to the village saxophonist.

I too was of no use, partly because I was walking on the hill about half a mile from the house. The other reason is simply that I was not interested. Later when I saw all my mother's property tumbling to ruin I did try to concentrate on the tragedy of it: shook myself, rubbed my arms and legs, even kicked my shins and jumped up and down as if my feet were asleep, but with no effect. I spent the entire time—two or three hours it must have

been—under a maple tree, and rescued nothing but one silver-backed hand mirror which fell out of an upper window and happened to land in my lap. I think that I was also the last person in the village to be aware that the house, where I was born and spent most of my childhood, was beginning to collapse. I noticed it quite by accident from the hill. The house was swaying very gently, the top of the cobblestone chimney with a graceful and independent motion, rather like the tail of a fish, and the foundations with a more irregular ebb and swell as if the stones were offering a futile resistance to their downfall. The kitchen ell and the woodshed had already gone down, tearing an ugly wound in the north wall and leaving the servant's quarters exposed.

Naturally I made my way back as quickly as possible, but the lane had become so overgrown with sumac and brambles that it was almost half an hour before I reached the road. By that time the whole town was present and the lawn was already clotted with little groups of people (in one place the ladies of the Altar Guild, in another the three families that lived off the town, and so on) debating the causes of the collapse and the possibilities of doing something about it. My mother was running from one group to another, shaking hands with everyone, receiving advice and expressions of sympathy. She had been at a cocktail party and cut an especially charming figure, with her white picture hat and her flowered print. So much so that for some time—until the front wall actually began to bulge out over the lawn, like a paper bag slowly surcharged with water—most of the people were unable to keep their minds on the disaster and acted as if they were attending an ordinary funeral or tea.

Now and then my mother paused in her rounds as hostess, tucking the minister's arm under hers, and while appearing to cast down her eyes, with one of her green calculating upward Victorian glances managed to caress his face. 'Ah Padre,' she sighed, plucking at the black cloth under her fingers, 'what a good friend you are,' and added, turning to the church ladies, 'He's the best democrat any of us has ever seen'. The minister, who had also been at the cocktail party and whose cheeks were somewhat flushed, gazed with sly benevolence over his flock, laughed his deep-bellied indifferent laugh, and kissed my mother's hand. 'Ha ha ha,' rattled the church ladies, and with one motion, as from a released spring, began to run in tiny circles around him, pointing delightedly

at his full chest and the rather uncouth vigour of his jaw. 'Always joking,' said the minister. 'Here her house is on the verge of collapse and she talks about democracy! What a woman!' At this the church ladies could no longer control themselves, they rolled and pivoted with laughter, poking each other's corsets and smacking their lips enviously toward my mother. 'It's true, upon my word it's true!' she cried, one arm to the sky. 'He treats us all the same, rich and poor alike! Here's to Padre!' and she raised her empty hand still higher in a toast. 'The best friend this community has ever had!'

In the meantime the disintegration of the house was becoming more and more apparent. From the upstairs bedrooms, and even in the pantry and dining-room, beams could be heard falling, and already a wide crack was beginning to open diagonally across the front living-room wall, exposing the dust-covered leaves of books, first the historical works and later the vellum-bound editions of Dante, Baudelaire, and Racine. It was this, I think, that first awoke my mother to a real awareness of what was happening. It was not only that the books were threatened with destruction; it was also obvious to everyone that their pages had not been cut. Even the town servants noticed it, even Myrtle who was hired for the lowest and heaviest form of cleaning, but Myrtle was a poor half-deformed creature and she would not have dared to smile behind her fingers as the others did.

One by one the books fell among the barberry bushes, raising a cloud of greyish powder so stifling that the people nearest were forced to stumble back over the flower beds, holding handkerchiefs to their mouths. 'Oh good Lord! the books! the books!' my mother gasped. She ran up under the crack in the wall, and holding her white hat with one hand, with the other attempted to catch the volumes as they toppled from their shelves. But they were coming too fast. Many of them, too, fell apart immediately against the outer air, leaving only something like silica dust mid-way to the ground, so that my mother was soon taken with a violent fit of coughing. At last, reeling and choking under the rain of classics that were now striking her head and breasts and shoulders, she was obliged to stagger back toward the road. 'A wonderful woman,' the ladies said, and they began to scamper to and fro, picking little bunches of sweet william, wild roses, and delphinium for my mother's hair. Gratefully she closed her eyes and was

nestling her grey curls more warmly against the Padre's lap, when the cobblestone chimney tore itself loose from the main beams of the house and crashed through the lower branches of the elms and across the lawn.

Immediately my mother sprang up.

'George! Burt! Albert!' she called. 'Somebody's got to save my things! Where's the Fire Department? Fire Department!' The Fire Department was not really a department at all, but a group of farmers who no longer farmed, so they had nothing better to do than to jump on the fire engine as it went by. They were now lying on the grass passing around a bottle of beer and laughing at some story or joke. 'George!' my mother wheedled. 'Albert! Burt!' and she ran from one to another, prodding and kicking them with her white pointed toe. The firemen looked up slowly at the waving roof and the colonial columns which were beginning to bend like wax candles in the sun, then hoisting their quids all together to the other side of their faces they announced, 'It ain't a fire,' and lay down again, covering their necks against the afternoon sun. 'But the highboy!' my mother cried. 'The highboy! It belonged to my grandfather, it's been in my family for two hundred years, my little old Aunt Mary left it to me in her will. She was so weak she could hardly hold up her head, and she whispered to me'—here my mother's voice broke—'she said, "I want you to have it, because it's the loveliest thing I have, and you're the only one that's stood by me all these years".'

This recital so moved my mother that for a full minute she stood with her face in her hands, sobbing, but perceiving that she had still had no effect on the Fire Department she whipped away the last traces of her grief and turned to hunt out Cedric the servant. Cedric, however, was in no condition to be called upon. The collapse of the kitchen ell, taking with it the entire outer wall of his room, had revealed him stark naked playing pinochle with one of the summer residents, an incident that he was now trying to explain to the saxophonist. 'Cedric!' my mother shouted. 'Come here at once!' But just then a shutter fell on Cedric from the attic window and with a moan he dropped to the ground, followed by his friend. Fortunately my mother was spared this scene. She had just remembered de Maupassant and was threatening to run into the house for him when she was assured that someone had seen someone taking him away.

In the end it was Myrtle who went in for the highboy. She was not at all anxious to go, even cried a little when it was first suggested, which was rather a surprise because everyone knew that her life was not worth anything. She had lost four fingers in a meat chopper, so perhaps it was the pain she was afraid of, or the noise: it was hard to tell. At any rate, as soon as she heard that the Selectmen had chosen her for the job she began to whimper and for several minutes stood twisting her fingers in her apron, made out of an old pair of bloomers my mother had given her, and chewing her hair. 'Oh no,' she muttered to herself, 'you don't see *me* going in there'—she had the habit of talking to herself while she worked, even told herself long stories sometimes as she cleaned the toilets—'Not me, nossir! They come up to me all together and they says, "Now Myrtle," they says, "you just run along in there and bring out that hairloom. 'Tain't as heavy as it looks," they says, kind of coaxing-like, "and mind you don't smash it on the way out." I like that! Mind you don't smash it, they says, on the way out! And there was the whole house rolling around and a crack in the front big enough to drive a Ford through. Why, you could watch the ceiling come down in the parlour, and all the upstairs furniture coming down too, bang! bang! bang! Mind you don't smash it, they says, on the way out! And do you want to know what I said?' Myrtle placed her crippled hands on her hips and with her eyes fiercely lit up she went on, raising her voice to a scream in order to hear herself above the splintering and crashing of the house. 'I says to them, "No!" I stood right up to them and I says, "I ain't going into that house, not if you give me a million dollars I ain't! And as for what I think of *you* . . . Yes," her lower lip began to twitch and her voice dropped suddenly, "as for what I think of *you* . . ." But she was now surrounded by all the important people in town, including my mother, the minister, and the schoolteacher—a tiny knifish man with a cone-shaped head and glasses—and realizing that she had been overheard she was taken by a fit of trembling and was unable to go on. 'I just got the habit of talking to myself,' she apologized, letting out a choked laugh, and then she began to cry again, with her head hanging and her red stubs pressed into the hair over her eyes.

'I have no sympathy with any of them,' said the schoolteacher. 'They ought to be horse-whipped, they don't want to work.' He strode through the crowd, receiving with a wrinkling of his

beagle's nose their murmurs of agreement, tore off a stout black cherry switch and with little nasal shouts, like a cheerleader, began to slash at Myrtle's ankles. 'Oh mercy,' said Cedric. He giggled a little, then with a sob turned back to hide his face. 'Oh darling,' he moaned, waving his fingers in the direction of Myrtle who was now hobbling toward the doorway. 'It has such dreadful feet!'

My mother was not wholly in sympathy with the schoolteacher's tactics. She pushed her arm under Myrtle's, and half dragging, half comforting her, pressed a dollar bill between her thumb and what was left of her forefinger. 'I want you to take this, my dear, and get yourself something pretty.' Without raising her eyes Myrtle took the money and poked it in her shoe.

In the doorway a new difficulty arose, the columns and the door-frame itself having already collapsed, leaving only an irregular space no bigger than the entrance to a small kennel for Myrtle to pass through. However, several white-flannelled husbands now sprang into action, lifted Myrtle over the debris on the stoop, and twisted and heaved her head first into the hall. In less than a minute there was nothing to be seen of her but one soleless shoe with the crisp corner of a dollar bill sticking out at the side. 'It seems rather a pity,' the minister murmured, looking at my mother. 'Yes,' she hesitated. 'Poor dear Myrtle, she's such a pitiful little creature really and she has so little . . . But of course I can make it up to her.' She smiled, grabbed the dollar, and with a hidden ladylike gesture forced it into the Padre's reluctant hand. 'For the new altar cloths,' she whispered. 'I have so little these days, but this much I *can* do for the community.'

For almost half an hour Myrtle fought her way through the wreckage inside the house, trying to reach the highboy in the downstairs guest room. From time to time we could see her face in an upstairs window, perspiration dropping from her hair, or her arm through one of the cracks that were now widening on every wall. 'Hurry!' my mother shouted with increasing anger as one by one her treasures—a Russian icon, the Dresden china coffee cups, the Renaissance desk brought so tenderly from Florence—fell and were crushed. 'Hurry up, Myrtle! Hurry up! Hurry up!' And every time a part of Myrtle came into view the schoolteacher's eyes brightened and he danced back and forth cracking the black cherry whip above his head. 'She's a good worker, but terribly slow,' the ladies agreed, twisting their

handkerchiefs and criticizing Myrtle's progress through the house. Some of them, the old New England stock, filled the time more usefully: dusted the grass and bushes where the books had fallen and arranged those that had remained intact in neat piles along the flagstone walk.

During this time the front of the house had been bellying more and more out toward the lawn so that it was no longer possible to see into the guest room. 'It's gone!' my mother cried. 'Ah, Padre!' and she leaned against the minister. But a moment later Myrtle appeared again, this time on all fours, crawling up the circular staircase with the highboy on her back. 'Bring it down! Down, Myrtle!' All the downstairs exits, however, were blocked: the lower half of the staircase too was caving in, leaving Myrtle hanging by two fingers while with the other hand she struggled to keep the massive piece of furniture from slipping back into the pit. Now and then over the sounds of falling timber we could hear her groaning and crying out, 'Oh Holy Virgin, help . . . Oh blessed mother of God . . .' Then the whole front of the house squeezed down slowly, and we heard nothing more but the breaking of beams and an underground commotion of water as heavy objects fell through to the cellar.

The next and last time that we saw Myrtle she was trying to reach one of the attic windows, still struggling under what must have been a part of the highboy, though it was bashed to a skeleton. Her face was dreadfully distorted, as if she had been pinned under some heavy weight and in freeing herself had pulled her features half off. Of her nose there was nothing left but a bloody splinter of bone, and her chin, which had been rather underhung, now stuck out in sharp diagonal, forcing her mouth into an enormous grin. Yet in spite of this it seemed as if she were trying to smile, perhaps out of pride in having salvaged as much as she had. She kept pointing at the mahogany ruin on her back, nodding continually and working her mangled features in an effort at communication. 'I can't bear it,' Cedric said, 'they oughtn't to allow such things,' and he turned yellow and vomited in a patch of lilies. Everyone else was shouting at Myrtle—'Don't throw it!' 'Wrap it in a blanket!' 'Let it down here!'—but she had suddenly let go her load. Even from the ground one could see the wild look that came into her eyes, a brilliant hatred aimed down at the crowd. Yet perhaps there was some confusion in it

too, for before the wall crashed her face changed again—for a moment she resembled a small wounded animal crying for its life—and she fell with her torn-off wrists lifted up in prayer.

The rest of what happened was so sudden that I have no clear recollection of it. I remember that shortly after Myrtle's death the ladies set to gathering flowers again and made a kind of tiny monument of them of the grass, with POOR MYRTLE written in English daisies across the top. The schoolteacher scoffed at this, saying there might have been some sense to it if she had done what she was sent for, but the general opinion was that the ladies had been very kind to think of such a thing. 'She was very bitter,' the minister said, 'but a good soul, too,' and he took the carnation from his buttonhole and tossed it on the mound.

I think it was at about that time that the French poodle suddenly clawed its way up to the window of my mother's bedroom, the only part of the house that was still standing. Yapping and rolling his eyes he perched on the swaying sill, his bandaged paw held up and a large drop of yellow liquid rolling down his aristocratic nose. 'Moppy! Moppy!' my mother cried, running up under the wall. 'Did you think your mummy had forgotten you? Oh Moppy you did, you're crying! He's crying,' she repeated, almost crying herself. 'He thought I was going to leave him there all by himself. Come to me, my darling, come to your mummy, jump!' I remember the two of them that way: the dog afraid to jump, tossing his ruff and his long silken ears, and my mother in a new flowered print and a picture hat, holding her arms, with an expression of love, almost—I thought at that moment but I am not so sure now—almost a look of fulfilment in her face, which at times made one think of a madonna though the profile was too sharp. And then the last of the house fell and buried them.

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STUDIES IN GENIUS: II

ST. JOHN OF THE CROSS HIS LIFE AND POETRY

GERALD BRENAN

I. LIFE

ST. JOHN OF THE CROSS owes his fame to being one of the greatest and most uncompromising of the Catholic mystics. It is less known that he is also one of the supreme lyric poets of any country or age. It is his poetry that we propose to discuss here. But no poet's work can be properly understood without some reference to his life. This is especially true of St. John of the Cross, whose best poems, though in rather a peculiar sense, are autobiographical. For this reason some preliminary account of it seems necessary.

As it happens, it was a very extraordinary life. Merely as a story it is full of dramatic interest. It takes one into a strange world of ascetics and religious revolutionaries, which turns out to have much the same passions and rages as the world outside. We are shown faked elections and unjust purges and prisons and escapes from prison—all the paraphernalia of the modern Spanish scene—whilst within the microcosm of a convent struggle we get a very real and convincing political issue. How many people, I wonder, know that St. John of the Cross owed his final disgrace to having made himself the champion of the vote by ballot? This makes me think that even those who do not care about Spanish poetry may find something to interest them in his story and be surprised to see how—and from what a strange angle—it throws light upon the situation of the world today.

Juan de Yepes—that was the poet's family name—was born in 1542 at Fontiveros, a village that lies on the borders of Old Castile between Avila and Salamanca. His father was a man of good family who had married below his rank and sunk to the humble position of weaver. A few years after Juan's birth he died, leaving his widow and three sons in great poverty.

Fontiveros is a village of brown sun-dried brick, standing on a

wide plain sown with corn. It has no stream to water it, and few trees. In the distance stands a long wall of mountains, covered during the greater part of the year with snow. Here Juan spent his boyhood. To earn a little money he worked for a carpenter, a tailor and a painter, whilst his mother sat at her loom. But trade was bad, the rising cost of living due to the import of Peruvian silver was ruining the wool industry, and when Juan was thirteen or fourteen his mother moved to the neighbouring town of Medina del Campo.

Medina was not then the dusty, decayed place it is today. Its new brick palaces, faced with armorial bearings, its churches and convents and hospitals, and above all its great square, marked the site of one of the largest fairs in Europe. Here, during three months in each year, the streets were thronged with merchants from every part of the world, who came to exchange the goods of Flanders and Germany for those of Spain and the Indies. Nowhere else in the country, except at Seville, could be seen such movement and animation. And Juan had every opportunity for observing it. Whilst his mother worked at her loom, he was taken on at a hospital that treated syphilitic patients, where his particular job seems to have been to beg for alms in the streets. However, this did not take up all his time. Being a promising boy, he was before long allowed time off to attend first an elementary school and then the grammar school that had just been founded by the Jesuits. Here he remained till he was twenty-one. Since his master, though only four years older than himself, was an enthusiastic Latinist, we may assume that he obtained a fair acquaintance with Ovid, Virgil and Horace.

The profession of priest was the obvious career for this young man of poor family to adopt, and the patron of the hospital, where he had now ceased to work, offered him a chaplaincy if he followed it. But Juan refused. His heart was already set on leaving the world, and he took vows as a Carmelite friar with the name of Juan de San Matías.

His education, however, was not yet complete if he wished for ordination. In the following year, therefore (1564), he went to the University of Salamanca where he remained till 1568, going through the usual triennial course of arts, but giving only a year to theology. Salamanca at this time was a city of churches, colleges, convents and lodging-houses. In spite of its imposing

buildings, it was a decaying place, without industry or agriculture: the fine clay loam of its fields had gone out of cultivation and the foreign visitor was struck by a depressing air of poverty and wretchedness, which was not redeemed by the sight of a few richly dressed students.

We know little of Juan's life during his stay here. Did he attend the lectures of the great humanist and poet, Fray Luis de Leon, who a little later was to spend four years in the dungeons of the Inquisition? And what were his theological studies? The teaching of philosophy in Salamanca at this time followed neo-scholastic lines—St. Thomas, with a certain leaning to St. Augustine. As M. Baruzi has pointed out, this would have suited the young friar well. He had not a speculative mind: all he required of theology was a conventional idiom which could be used to frame his experience. Mysticism, on the other hand, was highly suspect. The whole spirit of the university was against it and it was largely through the influence of its professors that a number of Spanish and Flemish mystical works—including such eminent names as Luis de Granada—had been placed on the index. But the teaching of the great Salamanican humanist, Francisco de Vitoria, still had a certain weight, and he had attached the utmost importance to the study of the Bible and of the Early Fathers. This teaching bore fruit, for the Bible was to be Fray Juan's constant companion throughout his life. No Protestant divine ever quoted Scripture more often.

The turning point of the young man's career came in September 1567. Teresa de Jesus, now a woman of past fifty, had arrived at Medina to found a convent of the Reformed Carmelites—that is, of nuns who wished to return to the primitive rule. She wanted also to found a convent or priory (either word can be used) for men and, as luck would have it, discovered that the prior of the Mitigated Carmelite house at Medina was ready to help her. This good man, Antonio de Heredia, was approaching sixty, fond of his dignity and accustomed to certain comforts, so that she had doubts as to his suitability. But he promised to persuade a young, very religious friar of his to join him. This was Juan de San Matías, then on vacation. Dissatisfied with the laxity of his order and with his head full of the feats of the primitive Fathers of the Desert—the adventure literature of young monks—he had been considering joining the Carthusians. But, after listening to

Teresa, he agreed to do as she wished, 'provided'—here one sees the young man's impatience—'he did not have to wait long'.

The Reformed Carmelite Movement, of which Teresa de Jesus was the foundress, was a movement whose main—indeed sole—object was prayer and contemplation. Teresa had founded it to teach others to follow the same road towards mystical union on which she had made such progress herself. The friars were to have certain duties of preaching, but the chief part of their life was to be spent in chapel and at solitary devotions. Prolonged fasting, reduced hours of sleep, weekly penances, were required by their rule, but practices of extreme asceticism were not permitted. Instead, there was a certain technique of *recogimiento* or recollection. However, the aim was not simply, as it had been in earlier days, to save their own souls. Prayer was also a weapon. Teresa was deeply conscious of the civil wars and heresies that were tearing Europe to pieces, and hoped by this act of contrition to mitigate it.

Perhaps we shall see these Carmelites best in their historical perspective if we regard them as a new sort of Conquistadors. The age of geographic explorations and adventures had been followed by an age of mental and spiritual ones, represented in France by Montaigne and later by Descartes. Yet it was not a merely intellectual enterprise that these monks and nuns were engaged on: they believed, and in this the authority of the Church supported them, that, if grace were given them, they could carry the whole mind, with its affections as well as its understanding, to union with the source of that mind, which is God. Since love was the motive, Eros the engine in their hull, their course took the form, and is therefore expressed in the language of a love affair.¹ It was the extreme of sublimation—the final point, if one likes, of that historic movement of love for the absent, *amor de lonh*, which had inspired the Provençal poets and through them Dante and Petrarch. This was the venture, the *dichosa ventura*, to which Fray Juan de San Matías was now committed. He took vows in November 1568, changing his name to Juan de la Cruz.

There is a charm about the small beginnings of heroic enterprises. The foundation of the first Reformed Carmelite priory

¹ *Aunque es verdad que la gloria consiste en el entendimiento, el fin del alma es amar.* Note in San Juan's handwriting on the margin of the Cántico Espiritual, stanza XXXVIII, *Allí me mostrarías . . .*

recalls in its great hopes and tiny resources the first hermitage by the ruined chapel of the Portiuncula of St. Francis of Assisi. The place chosen was a hamlet, a few miles from Fontiveros, Juan's birthplace, called Duruelo. Today Duruelo is a farmhouse in a shallow valley. A little stream runs between grass fields and thistles: a few willows line it; there are a few evergreen oaks. Beyond the rim of the valley lies the snow-covered Sierra de Gredos, some thirty miles off. Here among tumbled-down buildings and barns—for with the ruin of Castilian agriculture the place was then half depopulated—the four friars founded their first house.

Teresa, who had chosen the site herself, visited Duruelo again that winter. In her *Book of Foundations* she has left us an enthusiastic account of her impressions. Fray Antonio, clad in his white serge cape and brown habit, with a look of gaiety on his face, was sweeping the porch when she came up. 'How is this, Father?' she said to him. 'What has happened to your dignity?' And he replied, smiling, 'I curse the day I ever had any'.

The entrance hall had been converted into the chapel. It was full of crosses and skulls. The attic above formed the choir. At one end of it, close under the eaves, were two little cells or hermitages, giving a view of the altar and so low that one could enter them only on one's hands and knees. Here, with stones for pillows, their feet wrapped in hay, among more crosses and skulls, the friars remained praying from midnight to daybreak whilst the snow drifted on to their clothes through the tiles. They ate from broken crockery and drank from gourds; their only other possessions were a few books, some scourges and bells, and five sand clocks, which the meticulous Fray Antonio had insisted on bringing. Delighted by their enthusiasm, Teresa told them that all the same they must moderate their penances. For example, they must not go about bare-foot.

The foundation of a convent belonging to one of the stricter orders set up an excitement in the sixteenth century that we find it hard to understand today. Four or five nuns, whose faces no one would ever see and whose voices few would hear, had only to barricade themselves in a ruined house for the whole town to be in commotion. For the men of that age believed that spiritual things were not only more important than material ones, but that in a direct and immediate way they controlled them. A convent

or monastery, therefore, whose inmates spent their lives in fasting and prayer, was looked on as a sort of power house that radiated benefits upon the whole neighbourhood. Quarrels and dissensions would decrease, the interest on loans would fall, alms-giving would be more abundant, above all, purgatory would be shortened. Thus it was that the little community of Duruelo, as soon as the rumour of its austerities got round, caused a stir in the whole district. Many people came to visit it, including Fray Juan's mother, brother and sister-in-law, who, after the fashion of Spanish families, camped down in the shadow of their successful son. An anecdote tells us how much he disliked these interruptions and how, when out preaching, he would refuse the meal offered by the parish priest and retire to the edge of a field, by the bank of a stream, to eat his bread and cheese alone. But the community prospered, so that eighteen months later it was necessary to move to a larger and a more convenient building in the neighbouring village of Mancera. Duruelo was retained as a retreat or *desierto*.

The Reformed Carmelites grew rapidly during the next few years. More priories were founded. We hear of Juan de la Cruz acting as master of novices at Pastrana, close to Alcalá de Henares, which not long before had been a great centre of *iluminados*, and then teaching at a Carmelite college at Alcalá itself. Here, no doubt, he continued his theological studies. But it is clear that he was something of a disappointment to Teresa owing to his retiring disposition and to his dislike of responsibility. He shrank from the office of prior and from any organizational work, so that the task of drawing up the Constitution was given to Fray Gerónimo Gracián, a man three years younger than he was, but handsome, well born, gifted, and full of charm and eloquence. This Gracián was a great pleaser of women: he made a deep impression on the elderly foundress and soon became her right-hand man and confidant.

The success of Teresa's reform had raised against her many enemies, the most bitter of whom belonged, of course, to the unreformed body of her own order. But there were doubts and suspicions in some of the higher circles of the Church as well. The Conservatives—and Spain was every day becoming a more Conservative country—looked askance at this 'gadabout nun', who travelled all over the country founding convents for contemplatives and having ecstasies and visions. Only the charm of

her personality and her skill in using it to win over her enemies prevented her movement from being suppressed. But there were some who, though they admired her reforming zeal, thought it should be turned from the new channels it had taken and given the task of disciplining the unreformed Carmelites whom she had left. She was to be made, not to form a small élite of spiritual Stakhanovites, but to raise the general level of the conventual proletariat. The Apostolic Visitor, who represented the authority of the Nuncio and the King, was one of the people who thought like this, and in 1571 he nominated her prioress for three years of the large unreformed convent of the Encarnación at Avila. So Teresa returned to the rambling building where she had spent more than twenty years of her life and where the majority of the nuns, lax and worldly in their ways, were hostile to her. To assist her in her task she appointed Fray Juan as confessor and spiritual director to the convent (May 1572).

Let us pause for a moment to see if we can form any impression of Juan de la Cruz's character at this time. I think we can best do this if we try to see him through Teresa's eyes. From her first meeting with him she had been a little ironical about this shy, reserved young man—a little Seneca, she called him—who was only five feet two inches tall and half her age. When she mentioned him in her letters it was to say that he was perfect—but she did not mention him often. The fact is that the men who attracted her were men who had lived in the world and had a talent for dealing with it. Provided they were religious, she did not mind if they had failings, but they had to be cheerful and conversable and to have a certain capacity for practical affairs. Now Fray Juan's whole nature was so strongly inclined to contemplation that till he was past forty he was of little use for anything else. 'We friars do not travel in order to see, but in order not to see,' he once said to a monk who had asked him to admire certain buildings. In other words, he was the perfect Carmelite—the type Teresa was trying to produce, for whom these innumerable new foundations were made—but her nature was curiously divided between action and contemplation, and it was on the active side that she now needed collaborators.

We detect, therefore, a certain tension between Madre Teresa and her young neophyte during the early years of their acquaintance. 'May the Lord,' she wrote on one occasion, 'deliver us



JOAN MIRO: Femmes dans la nuit. Gouache on canvas. 1946



Femme devant la lune. Oil. 1944

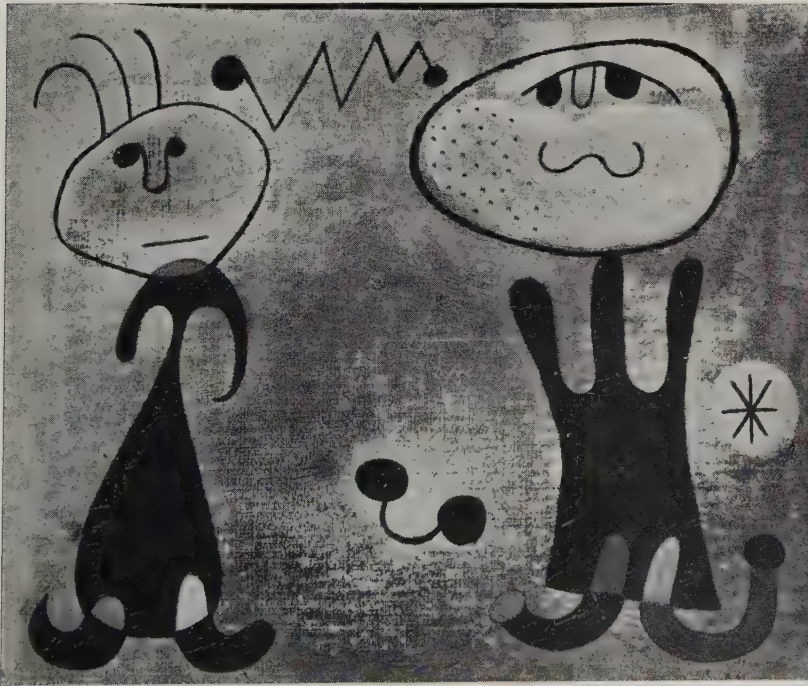


Femmes, oiseaux
et serpent devant
le soleil. 1944

Femmes dans la nuit. Oil. 1944



Femmes dans la nuit. Oil. 1944





Personnages, oiseau. Gouache. 1942

from people so spiritual that they will admit nothing that falls short of perfect contemplation!' In another letter she speaks of having 'at various times been annoyed with him'. And we may suspect, from anecdotes that have come down to us, a certain resistance on his part to her blandishments. For example, we hear of his mortifying her by giving her an unusually small host at communion when she had just said that she liked large ones. Then there is that story of his setting out from Baeza with a bag of Teresa's letters on his shoulder and scattering them on the way because, as he remarked, 'a friar should not be encumbered with unnecessary possessions'. This was no doubt a very proper sentiment for a Carmelite, yet to anyone else in Teresa's entourage it would have seemed a sacrilege. However, we do find that, from the time of his establishment at Avila, her views towards him changed. She praised warmly the delicacy of his spiritual direction, his perfect understanding of the finer shades of prayer: in other words, the subtlety of his psychological intuitions. And as the troubles in the order mounted, she came to admire his courage and fixity of purpose. Towards the end of her life we find her twice begging Gracián—in vain, for he was jealous—to send Fray Juan back to her in Castile.

Juan de la Cruz spent five years as confessor to the nuns of the Encarnación. We may safely suppose that this period was especially important for his development. Teresa was writing the *Interior Castle* at this time, and they must have had many discussions upon their spiritual experiences. Did she give him to read the mystical works that had most influenced her—Osuna, Laredo, and Luis de Granada? It is possible that he had not read the first two, for his masters were the earlier classics—St. Bernard, St. Thomas, St. Augustine and the pseudo-Dionysius. We can also see signs of his influencing her, for she wrote down her thoughts upon the *Song of Songs*. But did Fray Juan himself write anything? We do not know, for on the night of 3 December 1577, a gang of men broke into the little house at the end of the convent garden, where he was living with another friar, and carried the two of them away prisoner. He had time to swallow some of his papers and to destroy others; the rest were seized by the people who arrested him.

The cause of this violent action lay first of all in the hatred of the unreformed or Mitigated Carmelites for the reformers. But

why had they picked on the retiring and inoffensive Fray Juan? This is to be explained by an election that had just taken place in the Convent of the Encarnación. Teresa's term as prioress was over, her successor had come and gone and now a third election had to be made. There were two parties among the nuns—the reforming party, who wanted Teresa back again, and the conservatives, who wanted someone else. The Provincial of the Order himself came down to superintend the affair and, as feeling ran high and he supported the conservative candidate, he began by threatening to excommunicate any nun who should vote for Teresa. But fifty-five, supported by Fray Juan's exhortations, declared in spite of this their intention to vote for her. The scene that followed has been described by Teresa in one of the most brilliant of her letters. The Provincial took his stand by the grille, excommunicating and cursing those nuns who voted contrary to his wishes and crumpling, striking and burning their voting papers. However, even this did not produce the result that he wanted. He therefore gave orders that none of the recalcitrant nuns should attend mass or see their confessors until they had voted as he desired. When they again refused, he declared the election null and void and appointed the nun who had obtained the lesser number of votes to be prioress.

This typical Spanish election had a typical sequel. The secret fomentor of the dissident nuns, Fray Juan de la Cruz, was beaten up and carried off to prison. Yet had this been no more than a quarrel between nuns, the Carmelite Provincial would never have dared to take such an extreme step. The real causes lay deeper. The Carmelite General, Rossi, wished to restrict the Teresan reform to its present limits and had therefore forbidden them under threat of dire penalties to found any houses in Andalusia. This naturally did not please the reformers, who wished to expand, and so they had evaded the General's orders by appealing to another authority, the Apostolic Vicar, who nominally represented the Pope but in fact the centralizing policy of the King. Empowered by him, Gracián had not only spread the Reform to Andalusia, but had interfered in a very imprudent way with the Mitigated houses. These houses had protested and the General and his representatives were furious with what they regarded as the rank disobedience of the reformers.

But Juan de la Cruz had not been concerned in any of these

proceedings. His actions, though irritating to the Provincial, had not in any way been censurable. Why then had the blow fallen on him? The most plausible explanation seems to be that behind the scenes there were more powerful forces at work. The Inquisition was at this time conducting an inquiry into the methods of prayer of the Reformed Carmelites, which, in the words of the great conservative theologian, Melchor Cano, 'savoured of the heresy of the Iluminados'. They had in their hands at that moment a copy of Teresa's Autobiography. Her confessor, Fray Juan de la Cruz, had already several times been denounced to them. The person who had ordered his arrest, the Carmelite Vicar General, was one of their Consultors. It seems probable therefore that one of the motives behind his imprisonment was the hope of getting further materials upon the case. Formal proceedings against the Reformed Carmelites was not a thing to be decided on lightly, for Teresa had powerful friends, some of them among the Inquisitors themselves. The arrest and prosecution of the Primate of Spain a few years previously had had unfortunate repercussions.

But where had Fray Juan been taken? The day after his arrest Teresa wrote to Philip II, saying with her customary outspokenness that she preferred to see him in the hands of the Moors than in those of the Mitigated Carmelites—'they at least would have more pity'. But the months passed and nothing was heard of him. In August Teresa was writing 'I don't know how it is that no one remembers that Saint'. If he was in the hands of the Inquisition, few people would have wished to remember him.

Actually he was in the Carmelite Priory at Toledo. His prison was a sort of cupboard, used at times as a jakes and so dark that one could not see to read in it. Every day he was taken down to the refectory where he had to eat his crusts and water on the floor, after which he was given the worst punishment known to monks—the circular discipline. Whilst he knelt on the ground the friars walked in a circle round him, scourging him on the bare back with leather whips. Later these disciplines were given him only on Fridays, but they were so severe that they damaged his shoulders permanently and he bore the marks of them to the end of his life.

There were other torments too. For eight months he was given no change of clothing and he suffered cruelly from lice. The cold of winter and the heat of summer equally troubled him. He had

dysentery and, like Abelard, believed that the monks were trying to poison him. But a new gaoler who came in May took pity on him and allowed him to walk about in a neighbouring room whilst the monks were taking their after-lunch siesta. In this way he was able to keep his strength up.

One evening, we are told, he heard a voice singing a *villancico* or love song in the street outside. The words were these:

Muérome de amores,
Carillo, qué haré?
—Que te mueras, alahé!

‘I am dying of love. Dearest, what shall I do? —Die.’ And at once he was carried away by an ecstasy. The words, or the idea, of a poem came into his head. As we shall see later, his two most important poems, the *Cántico Espiritual* and the *Noche Oscura*, were both begun in prison, whilst another of his more disturbing ones, *Aunque es de noche*, was completed there. He was able to write them down with a pen and paper which the gaoler gave him.

Then one August night a new resolution came to him—to escape. It happened in this way. On the eve of the Assumption of the Virgin the Prior of the Convent entered his cell, and after kicking him brutally and rating him for his disobedience, promised to release him if he would abandon the Reform and return to the mitigated rule. Juan replied that he could not break his vows, but asked if he might be allowed to say mass on the following day, as it was the feast of the Virgin. The Prior angrily refused and went out. But that night Our Lady appeared to Juan in a dream. Filling his cell with light, she commanded him to escape, promising her assistance. This dream drew out an early memory. Once as a little boy at Fontiveros he had fallen into a pond. As he struggled in the mud and water he had seen a well-dressed lady on the bank whom he had taken to be the Virgin. He had stretched out his arms to her, but with closed fists because his hands were too dirty to take hers. Then someone else had pulled him out. He now felt assured that, in spite of his weakness, with her help he would be able to escape from prison.

He set about the business methodically. Thanks to his gaoler’s laxity he was able to reconnoitre the convent whilst the monks were at dinner. It was a large, new, three-storied building, rising immediately above the gorge of the Tagus on the eastern fringe

of the city.¹ At the far end of it he found a window looking out on the river which he thought would serve his purpose. But it would be necessary to find a way of opening the door of his cell and of the room adjoining it, which were fastened by padlocks. He set to work to loosen the staples.

The night he had chosen for his attempt—16 August 1578—came round. As it happened, two friars from another convent were lodged that evening in the room next to his. Since it was very hot, they left the door into the corridor open and laid their mattresses across it to get what freshness they could. Then, as they still could not sleep, they lay awake talking so that two had struck before Juan dared to open the door of his cell. The noise of the staple coming out woke them, but they dropped off again. Stepping across their bodies, he reached the corridor and the window.

It was really a little balcony or *miradorcillo*, supported by a joist that rested on the brick wall. Juan had with him the gaoler's iron *candil* or oil lamp, to which he had tied a rope made of strips from his blanket and tunic. He hooked this to the joist and lowered himself. Then he dropped and landed unhurt on the top of the city wall, among loose blocks of masonry. It was very dark and he could hear the noise of the river running in its deep trough below.

A dog was nosing among the offal thrown out of the refectory window. To see how it would go, Juan threatened it and it leaped down into a little *corral* or court. He followed and found himself in an enclosure bounded on two sides by the walls of the Carmelite Priory and of a Franciscan convent for nuns, and on the other, facing the river, by the city fortifications. The dog had vanished over another wall or fence, but when Juan tried to follow, he found it too high for him to climb in his feeble state. Calling on the Virgin and going up to it, he found himself all at once, he did not know how, in the street on the other side.

He was now free in a city he did not know at an hour when the life of all cities is mysterious and strange. The lane he was in led him to the Plaza de Zocodover, where he saw the lights of the stalls and the market women busy arranging their wares: as he passed they shouted out ugly words at him. Then he met a woman leaving her house to go to her stall and asked her the way to the

¹ It was destroyed in the Peninsular War, but the heaps of rubble where it stood can still be seen. In El Greco's Plan of Toledo it is the large building that rises immediately to the right of the bridge.

Reformed Carmelite Convent. She told him, but since it would be shut till daybreak, offered to let him remain in her house until then. He refused. Then he came to the door of a gentleman's mansion which stood open. The gentleman, with a naked sword in his hand, was searching his *zaguán* or entrance hall, whilst a servant held a torch to light him. Juan asked his permission to sit in his hall till daylight. The gentleman consented, the door was shut and bolted and the household went to bed.

At daybreak the door was again opened and Juan went out. He had no cape and his tunic was torn and dirty, so that the passers-by jeered at him. But as he hurried along, in all the churches and convents of the city the angelus was ringing. On reaching the Carmelite house he found the nuns at matins. A nun, Leonor de Jesus, came to the grille. '*Hija*', he said, '*Fray Juan de la Cruz soy, que me he salido esta noche de la prisión. Dígaselo a la Madre Priora.*' The prioress, Ana de los Angeles, was called and let him into the convent. A sick nun who needed confession was the excuse for this grave breach of the rules.

The sisters, heavily veiled over their long white robes, collected round. Some light refreshment—pears stewed with cinnamon—was set out, and, as he ate, he told his exciting story. They looked at him with pity. So worn and disfigured was he that—as one of them later said—he looked like an image of death. But meanwhile his escape had been discovered and the Carmelites of the Observance were looking for him. Two friars arrived with *alguaziles* or police officers and searched the convent premises, but did not dare to violate the enclosure. When they had gone, the gates were locked and Juan went into the church. Here he dictated some verses he had composed in prison, but had been unable to write down. Then, in the evening, when the spies of the Observants had gone, a canon of the Cathedral who belonged to the great family of the Mendozas, sent his coach for him and took him away to his own rooms and to safety.

The Carmelite Reform was passing through a moment of great danger. In October a chapter met at Almodóvar, where Teresa and Fray Juan saw one another again. A few days later the Papal Nuncio, Sega, issued a decree placing them under the orders of the Unreformed Carmelites. He censured Teresa and degraded the three leading friars of the Reform. Juan de la Cruz was sent to the hermitage or 'desert' house of El Calvario in Andalusia, on

the upper waters of the Guadalquivir. Although he was appointed prior, it was a thinly veiled order of banishment.

One reaches El Calvario today by a road that branches off the main Jaen-Albacete highway and drops into the river gorge on its way to an electric power station. The deep green water flows between red rocks, tamarisks and oleander lean over it, while on the opposite bank the mountain rises up, spur above spur, like a folded greyish curtain. To reach the hermitage one must take a path up the hill to the left. The path zigzags through broom and lavender and cistus, among which, if it is spring, one will find small irises, jonquils and bee orchids. Then one comes to a piece of flatter ground. There is a barking of dogs, the bushes give way, and one sees before one a couple of whitewashed buildings, a walnut tree shading a courtyard and some ancient olives. This is El Calvario.

The six months that Juan de la Cruz spent here were among the happiest of his life. He was thirty-seven. He had emerged from the darkness of prison—‘that whale’ as he called it—into the beauty of an Andalusian spring and to the sort of wild landscape—*montes, valles, riberas*—that he preferred. Here he completed the poems that he had begun and laid the foundations of his prose works; when he left El Calvario, his poetical career was practically finished. But his happiness was not due only to solitude and to scenery. There were some thirty friars in the little farmhouse on the hillside, and some of them were old hermits from the Sierra Morena who had joined the Reformed Carmelites a few years previously. (The Carmelite Order had a tradition of descent from anchorites in Palestine which made it easier for them to assimilate these people.) Among them we read of Brother Hilarion, an old man of seventy with flowing white beard and hair, who recalled the Fathers of the Desert; or Brother Alonso, the cook, who picked for salad any herb that his mule stopped to eat. The simplicity of these men must have delighted Juan, whose lighter reading since boyhood had been the legends of the primitive monks and hermits. And there were the younger friars too whom he instructed in methods of prayer, sitting out at sunset or by starlight under the pine trees.

But it was not only men whom he taught. A couple of leagues away over the hills lay the little town of Beas de Segura, in a valley planted with olive trees. Here there was a convent of

Castilian nuns, founded a few years before by Teresa. Ana de Jesus, the most devoted of her disciples, was Prioress and she had received two letters from the Foundress recommending Fray Juan as a 'divine and celestial man', 'whose like was not to be found in the whole of Castile' and who would help them greatly on the road to perfection. 'You can't believe', she had written, 'how much I miss him'! It became, therefore, one of Juan's duties to walk over on Saturdays and on the eve of feast days to confess and instruct them, returning to his 'desert' on Mondays. Some of these nuns had made great progress in contemplation and he found more scope than he had done at Avila for his gift of spiritual direction. Strongly as he guarded himself against human attachments, which he regarded as distractions, one may see from the fragments of his letters that have come down to us what a deep and tender impression these sisters made on him. To the end of his life he continued to write to them, and even when he was living in Granada he made a point of going every year to visit them. It was from his spiritual direction at Beas that his later prose works sprang.

In June 1579 Juan de la Cruz moved to Baeza, thirty miles lower down the Guadalquivir. Baeza is a small but ancient city built on a long spur of high land; all around it are rolling hollows of chalk down, green with corn in spring and in summer red with poppies. In the distance, a vast circuit of mountains. The reason for his going there was that a group of professors from the then flourishing university wished for instruction in the new methods of prayer and had asked for a Carmelite college to be opened among them. Juan's business was to direct it. But he seems to have been unhappy there; like Teresa, he had no sympathy with the facile Andalusian temperament and looked back with regret on the peaceful days at El Calvario or at Avila. To console himself, he made frequent journeys to visit his spiritual daughters at Beas.

On his way he used to stop at a Trinitarian monastery close to the village of Iznatoraf where the monks had caught the new vogue for contemplation. I visited this place in 1933 and was told an anecdote that has never, I believe, been published. The Prior said that a story had been handed down in his community that San Juan, when he stayed with them, used to disappear from sight into a little room in the belfry and to remain there for many hours on end, looking out through a window. However, as no

such room existed, he had always supposed it must be a legend. Then, a year or two before my visit, some repairs had been done to the tower and they had come across it. He took me to see it. It was a tiny cavity, little more than a cupboard, a couple of yards square; but through a loophole in the wall one had a view of hills and green fields.

There are other traditions of this sort about Juan de la Cruz, which were collected in 1616 and 1627, during his process of beatification. He liked to sit and contemplate where he could see water, trees or open sky. Thus at El Calvario we hear of his sitting at all hours of the day or night under the trees, with his friars around him, teaching them how to pray in different manners—sometimes to fix their minds on God alone, but at others to call on the sky and hills, the plants and the *hermosura de las cosas* (beauty of created things) to praise Him. At Granada we learn that he liked to pace, as other poets have since done, beside the rivers Genil and Darro. But what is most striking was his predilection for sitting alone in some dark and confined place, looking out on a distant view. At Pastrana there was a cave on a hill top which can still be seen. At Segovia his cell was at first in a cupboard under the stairs. Then he found a grotto on the summit of a hill, so small that one had to crawl into it on hands and knees, but commanding a wide view of city, mountains and fields. Here, at the end of his life, he used to spend many hours by day and night in contemplation. This love of certain aspects of Nature—stars, dawn, trees, hills, water—and, above all, silence, that sonorous insect-humming silence of Southern countries, is everywhere reflected in his poetry.

The struggle in the Carmelite Order was now ended. A period of growth and prosperity had set in for the Reform and in January 1582 Juan de la Cruz became prior of the new house at Granada. Here he remained quietly till 1585. The Convento de los Mártires—all religious houses are *conventos* in Spanish—was built on a spur of the Alhambra hill, just below the present Hotel Washington Irving. The elm woods had not yet been planted and the summit of the hill was bare, but the convent windows looked out over the flat green expanse of the Vega, dotted with white farms and olive trees and bounded on the left by the Sierra Nevada. Here, with one of the most beautiful views in the world before him, he wrote his four prose works in the form of commentaries on his poems.

His character seems to have matured and expanded with the responsibilities of office. We hear of him confessing the poor every week and visiting the hospitals. As prior he was an important person in the city and for the first time one gets the impression that he had attracted attention and found admirers. There were moreover, two things that must have given him pleasure: his brother had come to work at Los Mártires as mason and gardener, and the nuns of Beas had founded a convent in the city. The society of sisters of the same order provides a tender and romantic element in the harsh barrack life of a monk, and Juan, with his natural refinement, appreciated it.

Yet one must doubt whether the nostalgia he had felt at Baeza for his native Castile had altogether left him. Granada was not an attractive city at that time. The Moorish population had been expelled a dozen years previously and a new and uprooted class, with the vices and pretensions of colonials, was moving in from the North. Sullen-looking slaves filled the streets and, whilst the newcomers quarrelled over points of honour and precedence, the fertile countryside was going to ruin. The triumph of the Cross had turned this once-prosperous city into a camp and a brothel. As a point of curiosity we may note that at the Puerta de Elvira there still lived an old Moslem *beata*, a follower of the great Sufi mystic Al Gazzali, who practised the same sort of imageless contemplation that he did himself.

Juan's quiet life was brought to an end towards 1585 when, without giving up his priorate, he became Vicar Provincial for Andalusia. This was a post that required frequent journeying all over the south of Spain and sometimes as far as Lisbon and Madrid. Mounted on an ass—for his strength did not allow him to walk much—with a broad felt sombrero above his white cloak, he travelled the long roads, sleeping in the open air whenever possible, but when it was wet, in the *ventas*, which were noisier and more crowded than they are today. It was not a life he can have liked, but there were new troubles in his order which he must have found even more disturbing than these journeys.

The Carmelite Reform had emerged triumphant from its struggle with its unreformed brethren, for in 1580, whilst Juan was at Baeza, the Pope had set them up as a separate organization under their own Provincial. Then in 1582 Teresa had died. Her powerful figure gone, dissensions at once broke out among her

successors. The Provincial, Gracián, who owed his position to the Foundress's influence (the old woman's love for him is one of the most touching things in her story), was a soft and rather vain man, fond of pleasing others and relying too much upon his powers of fascination. It was the marvellous element that had drawn him to the mystical life and now that this was wearing thin he wished to turn the order towards preaching and missions. This was the more natural since he was an eloquent preacher himself and had had some success in the pulpits of fashionable churches in Seville. But Juan de la Cruz took a different view, though, having once stated it, he withdrew into himself and refused to enter into the struggle for place and influence.

However, a new and much more formidable party was coming to the front under the leadership of Nicolas Doria. Doria was a Genoese banker who had had business dealings with Philip II until, in one of those fits of repentance so common in that age, he became a monk. Partly through the King's influence, and with the backing of all those busy-minded people who had joined the Reformed Carmelites on account of its prestige but with no understanding of its spirit, he was elected Provincial in 1585 in Gracián's place.

Doria was precisely the man whom the authorities and the new spirit of the age needed. The bright extraverted eyes, hooked nose and receding forehead shown by his portraits confirm what we know from other sources about his character. He was a man of action. Narrow, inflexible, despotic, with great business capacity and drive, a rigorous ascetic, he set about organizing the Reformed Carmelite convents (they now numbered nearly a hundred) as though they were a chain store. He had been impressed by the disciplined organization of the Jesuits and by their conception of religion as an affair not so much of the interior life as of obedience and loyalty. He had also—an Italian and a business man—absorbed their ideas on mental reserve, which gave him an advantage over people who, as Spanish monks, had been brought up to say what they thought. No wonder Teresa had not liked him. 'There are some kinds of sanctity I do not understand,' she had written of him in her tart way to Gracián. But it was her fault. The Reform was now paying the price of having expanded too quickly and of having intrigued with the King's party against the General of their order.

Doria's new plan, accepted at a chapter in 1588, was to divide the Reformed Carmelites into six provinces, the heads of which were to be nominated by himself. This committee of seven men, known as the Consulta, would sit in Madrid and from there govern the order autocratically. The old independence of the priors was gone. Worst of all, the nuns would be placed, without representation of any kind, under the friars. New rules were to be given out which would take away their remaining liberties. It was a momentous change to make, for since 1247 the political organization of all Carmelites had been based on a constitution drawn up in imitation of the famous 'democratic' one of St. Dominic. But the friars offered no resistance. Gracián had already been disgraced and his supporters were too cowed to make much protest. Only the nuns showed spirit, and Fray Juan de la Cruz stood by them.

Juan was now Prior of Segovia. He seems to have reached at this time some new peak of his spiritual ascension. We hear of him sitting every night, writing or meditating in his cell, giving only a few hours to sleep and spending long hours in a grotto in the garden. The convent stands outside the city on the banks of the river and on summer nights the valley is loud with the singing of the nightingales. The hill above it, which is enclosed within its grounds, commands a view of the city, the plain and the distant mountains. Here, in a tiny grotto, or stretched out in the form of a cross under an olive tree, he would spend whole nights in contemplation. We have a poem of his, not a good one, which he wrote in a trance or ecstasy.

Then in May 1591 the expected blow fell. A chapter was held in Madrid and he went to attend it. Some dramatic event was expected, for Ana de Jesus, with the help of the aged poet Fray Luis de Leon, who was editing Teresa's works, had secretly obtained a brief from Rome that gave the nuns the right to govern themselves. 'Who knows', said a nun to Juan as he was setting out, 'but that Your Reverence may come back Provincial of this province!' 'No, no, daughter,' he replied. 'I shall be thrown into a corner like an old kitchen cloth.'

At the chapter Juan spoke up strongly. 'If at our assemblies men no longer have the courage to say what the laws of justice and charity oblige them to say, from weakness, cowardice or fear of annoying the superior and consequently not obtaining an office, then the order is lost and utterly relaxed.' And he demanded

that the voting should be by secret ballot. But the others were overawed and no one supported him. He was removed from his priorate and sent as a simple friar to the 'desert' house of La Peñuela in Andalusia. The King, whose policy Doria was carrying out, refused to accept the Papal brief.

The convent of La Peñuela was an old hermitage that had been taken over some fifteen years earlier, together with its hermits, by the Carmelites. As the place had proved to be unhealthy, the friars had moved soon after to El Calvario. Now it had been re-settled. It stood (the exact site is lost today) among evergreen oaks and cistus heath on the slopes of the Sierra Morena, at the foot of the famous pass of Despeñaperros. No doubt the place suited Juan for its great solitude, and we hear of him going out early every morning, before the heat of the day, to kneel by the rushes of a stream or under a tree. Sometimes, as his custom was, he spent whole nights in this manner. But he bore no resentment for his treatment. From Madrid he had written to one of the nuns of Beas:

'Y adonde no hay amor, ponga amor y sacará amor.' 'Where there is no love, put love and you will get back love.'

Meanwhile the persecution against him was increasing. Doria's first intention had been to get rid of him honourably by sending him at the head of a mission to Mexico. But when it was seen that the King's support in the matter of the brief could be counted on, it was decided to ruin him completely. He had owed his imprisonment at Toledo to his support of the Carmelite nuns and of their liberty to vote freely according to their conscience; now he would be made to suffer for the nuns again as well as for having demanded a secret ballot.

For this purpose a confidant of Doria, Fray Diego Evangelista, was sent to collect incriminating evidence against him and Gracián in the Andalusian convents. We know something of how he set about this from the sworn depositions made later by various nuns who had been interrogated by him. Diego's method was to question the nuns and, if he could not get what he wanted by threats, to falsify what they said. Some of his questions passed the bounds of decency and a nun at Malaga was made to declare that Fray Juan had kissed her through the grille. We may ask what use it was intended should be made of this document. Gracián was publicly stripped of his habit a few months later and expelled

from the country. Ana de Jesus was imprisoned; others of Teresa's followers were exiled to remote convents.¹ But there is reason for thinking that Juan de la Cruz's case was regarded more seriously on account of his great reputation for saintliness and that he would therefore be brought before the only body capable of breaking such reputations—the Inquisition. As the supreme guardian of Spanish religious policy and of its ever-narrowing line of orthodoxy, this body might be expected to act against him. At all events we know that people who had letters or papers of his destroyed them because they feared that it would be dangerous to have anything with his name on it. For example, we read of the large collection at Beas being burned so that the Visitor should not find them 'although the nuns regarded them as the letters of St. Paul'. If it is true that his works were mutilated, it was probably at this time. The last chapters of both the *Noche Oscura* and the *Subida del Monte Carmelo*, in which he had promised to deal with the state of union, are missing. It was a subject on which it had become dangerous to write, even for the most orthodox.

Juan, however, was spared this last indignity. In September he fell ill with fever and ulcers on his leg. To get treatment he was taken to the town of Ubeda, six leagues from La Peñuela and one from Baeza, and placed in the Carmelite house. Yet even here persecutions followed him: we read of the prior coming every day to his cell to reproach and insult him in spite of the great pain he was suffering. Then the ulcers spread to his body: the flesh on his legs rotted. He died at midnight on 14 December 1591, as the monks were ringing for prime. Almost his last act was to ask that some verses of the Song of Songs should be read to him. 'O *qué preciosas margaritas!*' he murmured.

Juan de la Cruz's death was followed by some extraordinary scenes which his modern biographers have preferred to pass over

¹ Gracián's later history is curious. He was taken prisoner by Moorish pirates and carried off to Africa. After two years of sufferings there he returned to Rome as a beggar. Clement VIII heard of his case and commanded that he be reinstated in his order. But though Doria was dead, his partisans were still in power and they refused to receive him. He was then—by a supreme irony—taken in by the Unreformed Carmelites. In old age he wrote an account of his life and died in Flanders in 1614. Ana de Jesus lived to carry the Carmelite Reform to France in 1604. She died in 1622, the year in which Santa Teresa was canonized.

in silence. Hardly had his breath ceased than, though it was an hour past midnight, cold and raining hard, crowds assembled in the street and poured into the convent. Pressing into the room where he lay, they knelt to kiss his feet and hands. They cut off pieces from his clothes and bandages and even pulled out the swabs that had been placed on his sores. Others took snippings from his hair and tore off his nails, and would have cut pieces from his flesh had it not been forbidden. At his funeral these scenes were repeated. Forcing their way past the friars who guarded his body, the mob tore off his habit and even took parts of his ulcered flesh.

A contest then began for his body. The patrons of the Priory of Segovia, a noble lady and her brother who had formed part of his circle at Granada, determined to obtain it for their city. After securing a royal warrant, they had it dug up by night in great secrecy. Although nine months had passed since his death, it was found not to have decayed and to give out an aromatic smell. They placed it in a trunk and set off by a roundabout road for Castile.

Here a curious piece of folk lore is reported by San Juan's first biographers. The Guardian Angel of Ubeda wished to defend the body against the Guardian Angel of Segovia. After failing to rouse the monks in time, he appeared by night on a hilltop outside Mártos and called in a loud voice to the bearers to take the body of the saint back to Ubeda. Their hair stood on end. But the Alguazil replied that he was acting on the King's orders and the mysterious apparition then allowed them to pass. We are reminded of the contest between Saguntum and Saragossa in Prudentius' poem on the martyrdom of St. Vincent.

San Juan's body, less a leg left in Ubeda, an arm in Madrid and fingers distributed elsewhere, finally reached Segovia. Dressed and covered with laurel leaves and flowers, it was shown to the city through a *reja*. The face was still recognizable. Other vicissitudes followed, for, following on an appeal to Rome, the remaining limbs were cut off and restored to Ubeda. But these, to our modern taste, somewhat ghoulish episodes have an important bearing on our story. Juan de la Cruz, to us who read his writings, is a poet and a mystic. But to his contemporaries he was a saint, with a sanctity doubly proclaimed by his devotion to a holy cause and by the persecutions which this devotion brought on him. The

people, with their medieval instinct for such things, recognized this and canonized him in their own way. And it was precisely this overwhelming movement of popular veneration that silenced his enemies and led to the first steps for his beatification being taken twenty years later. In all probability we owe to it the preservation of his poems and prose works.

In appearance Juan de la Cruz was a very small man with dark hair and complexion, a high forehead, arched eyebrows and a slightly aquiline nose. His glance, we are told, was gentle. He went bald early. But of his character there is little to be said. Unlike Teresa, he was singularly devoid of all those picturesque features one calls personality. We see a shy silent man, with downcast eyes, hurrying off to hide himself in his cell, and so absent-minded that, when spoken to, he often did not understand what was said. We note the immense tenacity of purpose that underlay his somewhat feminine sensibility and his entire and whole-hearted disposition to the contemplative life. Perhaps no one ever had a vocation that drew him more irresistibly. We see, too, his great patience—there were the makings of a stoic hidden under his monk's dress—and also a certain psychic force which led to his being greatly in demand for casting out demons—in modern language, curing hysterics. But the thing that strikes us most about him is his wilful and deliberate negativeness. All his contemporaries agree as to his reluctance to speak about himself and his dislike of unnecessary or trivial conversation. His voice was never raised, his face never lost its habitual calm. No one ever saw him lose his composure, or laugh, or show annoyance. Perhaps it was for this reason that his brother priors thought so little of him. And through his books there run like a refrain the words—secret, hidden, forgotten, in disguise, silence, bareness, night. We are left, as he would have wished, with the necessity of describing the character he presented to the world by negations and leaving it to his poetry to display his rich and passionate inner life. As for his prose, though inclined to prolixity, it shows a love for plain and exact statement and a certain gift for psychological analysis. No other writer of his age is so free from rhetoric.

But Juan de la Cruz's life has more in it than the life of a great poet and mystic. It has a historical significance too. The outward tragedy of his last years is also the tragedy of an epoch. Let me try to put this briefly in its proper perspective. The sixteenth

century in Spain was a century of religious revolution. This revolution began, as in England and Germany, in an atmosphere of humanism—return to the Bible and the Early Fathers, reform of medieval abuses, a new spirit of seriousness among the laity. Erasmus was the leading figure in this movement and down to 1550 the best of the Spanish clergy and intellectuals were his disciples. Then a sudden change occurred. The rise of Luther had made the Erasmists a centre party and as he grew in strength the situation became polarized into a Reformation and a Counter Reformation. Philip II succeeded Charles V, the policy of reconciliation in Germany failed and the Spanish Inquisition closed down on the Erasmists. But religious feeling in Spain continued to mount and the only outlet left open to it was the ascetic and mystical.

The first signs of this had come some time before from a small group of Franciscans. Influenced by certain Flemish writers, they had described a method of prayer which went beyond the contemplation of Christ's humanity—as taught by à Kempis—and sought union with the divine element. These ideas soon spread beyond the monasteries. All over Castile there sprang up the people known as the *Iluminados*. They were small groups of pious men and women who had been influenced by Erasmus, but still more by the Franciscan manuals of popular devotion. Being untrained in theology, they fell into various errors, and the Inquisition, which was alarmed by their anti-ceremonial tendencies, suppressed them. But the movement to deepen religious life could not be checked. It broke out in the convents, and, since monks and nuns are subject to strict control and were the declared enemies of the Erasmists, the Inquisition, after a brief period of suppression in 1559, when a large number of mystical works were put on the Index, decided to tolerate it. However it was not a decision that it found easy to make: religion in Spain had always been a conservative or, as Erasmus put it, 'Jewish' thing with little imaginative content. Mysticism was a practice which had come in from abroad. The only Spanish mystic of the Middle Ages was Ramon Lull, who had learned what he knew of it from the Moslems. It followed, therefore, that the strong conservative, *cristiano viejo*, element in the country was hostile to it. Their chief representative, the great theologian Melchor Cano, went so far as to declare that the tendency to an interior religion was the heresy of the age, of which Luther was only a branch. In

particular he held that the 'taking away of fear and the giving of reassurance' which resulted from mystical practices would undermine the position of the Church. The Inquisition therefore only yielded and tolerated the mystics because it found the impulse in that direction irresistible.

The outstanding movement towards a deeper religious life in Spain was the Carmelite Reform, which gathered together the scattered impulses that had preceded it. It began with St. Teresa's first foundation at Avila in 1562 and, as we have seen, spread rapidly. We may regard it as the spear-head of the second wave of the revolutionary process. Like the French Revolution—like all revolutions—it was a movement in search of liberty, though the liberty it sought was not a political one, but something much more fundamental—an interior one. Freedom for a sixteenth-century monk, though it needed for its exercise what one may call monastic democracy, meant freedom from the human situation of exile from God.

We may say too that, like other revolutions, it had its roots in an economic situation. The discovery of the silver mines in Peru, not long before the Inquisition turned on the Erasmists, had led to a severe and apparently uncontrollable inflation. All through the second half of the sixteenth century cloth factories were closing down, the land was ceasing to be tilled, the Government was sinking into debt. There was a levelling of classes, but the people were ceasing to work and Spain was rapidly becoming a country of impoverished parasites. The reaction to this economic landslide, which would today take a political form, then took a religious one. On the one hand it led—or helped to lead—to a tightening of the censorship and terror wielded by the Inquisition (Conservative Spain lived in mortal dread of Protestant infection), and on the other to a stepping up of the revolutionary enthusiasm. Let us say, if we may strain the analogy so far, to Robespierre and Danton.

Such rapidly developing situations can only end in a crisis. From the immediate point of view one can see that the great increase in the numbers of the Reformed Carmelites was bound to provoke a reaction within the Order, because few people are fitted by disposition for the contemplative life. In the common run of men, mystical practices stimulate the mind to action just as for most young persons of literary bent poetry is a stepping

stone to journalism or politics. But the revolt led by Doria which broke the Carmelite Reform must be seen in a wider aspect, as part of a large general process.

The Order which was to capture Spain in the seventeenth century and resolve the antinomy between the mystics and the Conservatives was the Society of Jesus. Now the fundamental nature of the Jesuit action, as it developed in the course of time, was to damp down and bring to an end the revolutionary religious movement of the sixteenth century and turn its spiritual and intellectual energies into an exterior conformism. The Jesuits were activists. Their conception of religion was political. Loyalty, obedience, discipline were the qualities they sought to inculcate, and in exchange for these they were prepared to relax the demands of the Church on ordinary men and to make religion easy and agreeable. The values of the Renaissance were brought back, though as mere decoration, shorn of their sense of hope and forward movement. An age began that, like our own, was driven back upon its own resources and forced to reflect itself, without stimulus from the past or hope for the future.

But it was a defeated age and it knew it. The convolutions of its Baroque sculpture, the twistings of its poetic idiom, are the marks of a culture that has been turned back and thwarted in its deepest organs of life. The whole tone of seventeenth-century literature in Spain is pessimistic. The men of that time were living in the trough of fatigue and disillusion that follows a great movement that has failed.

Perhaps we can now see that solitary mystic, Fray Juan de la Cruz, as a person in history. St. Teresa came out of the Middle Ages, whereas he belongs, with Luis de Leon and El Greco, to the prime of the Spanish Golden Age. The central activity of that age, the motive force that provided it with its energies, was religion. He was the leading pioneer in that religion, the deepest exponent of its message—what Pascal was to be in a more intellectual country and age. His disgrace and death mark therefore better than anything else the point where the revolutionary movement of the sixteenth century began to ebb and the new forces that were to bind the seventeenth century to take their place. In the absence of any better terminology, we can call this moment a Thermidor.

[To be continued.]

INNOVATION AND TRADITION IN CONTEMPORARY MUSIC—II

THE TRAGIC ART OF ANTON WEBERN

RENÉ LEIBOWITZ

IN a preceding article¹ I tried to explain the traditional significance of the music of Arnold Schönberg. Such an endeavour contains many implications of which the most important may possibly be formulated thus: if musical tradition as such is what principally determines musical authenticity, the activity of Arnold Schönberg (who, to quote my own words, 'has saved a tradition which without him might have been lost'), far from remaining a personal, strictly individual affair—however brilliant and remarkable—then becomes one of universal value and importance. In this sense the chief result of such an activity is the creation of a technical apparatus which solves the problems and difficulties with which musical idiom has met and it is thanks to this solution that the idiom is able to survive its own crisis. I have already hinted at this result (in my last article) and, in reference to it, I mentioned the names of Webern and Berg. It is indeed revealing to test the universality of a great master by his influence on other composers. Here again let us not consider the results of such an influence as simply a private matter but let us once more try to understand their traditional implications. The fact that the real significance of Schönberg lies in his prolongation of tradition implies that his impact on his disciples must have necessarily led them to highly specific positions with regard to tradition itself.

It may now therefore be stated that the so-called Schönberg school is not—and never has been—an esoteric sect, using its own private idiom. Empirically speaking, the continuous 'stream' of

¹See HORIZON No. 85.

newcomers, composers from all over the world who adopt the twelve-tone technique, bears evidence against such a theory. The fact that the 'school' in question has produced two very great composers, Berg and Webern, adds to the same evidence.

Personally, I do not believe that the presence of these two composers in the Schönberg school can be considered as a matter of chance, neither do I believe that their exceptional value is due only to their own talent and to the remarkable tuition of their master. I am, on the other hand, quite convinced of the fact that Schönberg's undertaking was so vast a one that it needed the help of other composers. Having already pointed out the main aspects of this undertaking, I wish to add now that it is in the awareness of the necessity of such an undertaking that the greatness of Schönberg, Berg and Webern lies.

The problems with which Schönberg had to deal in order to further tradition are now familiar to us. The same problems have of course preoccupied Berg and Webern, each one in his own way. Generally speaking, I should say that Berg's task has been to emphasize the links between his master and the *past*, while the work of Anton Webern lays its main stress on the possibilities of *further development* of some of the elements contained in Schönberg's music. Berg achieves a consolidation of the new idiom by connecting it with the previous one, Webern projects the new idiom into an unknown future. Such is the result of Schönberg's influence on Berg and Webern and such is the relationship which has remained between master and disciples even at a time when the disciples had long ago become masters themselves.

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The essential difference of Berg's and Webern's functions in musical tradition is due to a profound difference of temperament and personality. Berg's music is of a *lyric* character, Webern's is *tragic*. Here I intend to deal with the latter, but the former's case needs some examination.

Berg's lyricism is responsible for his attachment to the past. The past contains what one has loved at one time or another and lyricism is a means of expressing this love. Even when most wildly audacious Berg's music manages to recall *Tristan*, Mahler and early Schönberg, thus evoking some fantastic fairy tale of days gone by. By this I do not mean to say that there is a tendency

towards 'neo-classicism' or anything of that sort in *Wozzek* or the *Lyric Suite*. Far from it. Berg's idiom is as radical in its way as that of Schönberg or Webern. He uses the same elements, the same features, but somehow gives them a different surrounding, a different climate. In the days of Schönberg's powerful attacks against the classical tonal functions, when, for example, the famous *Chamber Symphony's* chords of perfect fourths appeared, nobody was more anxious than Berg to use the same material. But what is powerfully and victoriously stated as the result of a personal discovery in the work of Schönberg is introduced in Berg's *Piano Sonata*, op. 1, by cautious and progressive alterations of the typical Wagnerian and early Schönbergian harmonic figures. It is as if Berg were trying to demonstrate *ad oculos* the very ways and paths of musical history, to render explicitly what tradition implies.

Lyricism demands development; or, rather, it is this quality that is the result of the most specific lyrical characteristic: love and attachment. Thus Berg's evolution is one of continuous development. Whereas Webern, as we shall see, appears even in his very first work, so to speak, in definitive shape, the early works of Berg, however skilfully they are composed, call for the later ones in order to be fully understood. Development is also what characterizes Berg's compositional technique. A *Sonata* is his first work, its form is based on the very idea of thematic elaboration. Such an attitude indicates the composer's love for his themes. He is attached to them and that is why he cannot dismiss them without having 'made them say' everything of which they were capable.

For his first opera, *Wozzek*, Berg chooses a libretto dealing with highly lyrical characters: Maria, the thoughtless prostitute, and Wozzek, the unfortunate soldier. The composer's attachment to these characters expresses itself in a feeling of pity, which is transmitted to the spectator.

The *Chamber Concerto* for violin, piano and thirteen wind instruments uses, throughout the work, three motives based on the letters of the names of Arnold Schönberg, Anton Webern and Alban Berg. The latter's love and attachment for his master and for his fellow disciple is thus transposed in musical symbolism, an item which occurs often in Berg's music.

The *Lyric Suite* (the title is not an accident) avoids creating the feeling of having a proper ending. The last theme is abandoned,

rather than finished by all the instruments in turn, because they cannot go on playing for ever; but a footnote at the bottom of the last page of the score emphasizes that the viola, which is the last instrument to go on playing, may well repeat the final interval D flat - F, once or twice more than is indicated until, by a progressive diminuendo, it will fade away from our hearing.

Similar procedures and characteristics can be found and more closely discussed in all Berg's works. From what I have said I hope to have made my point clear enough.



The case of Anton Webern is absolutely different. Before examining the tragic features contained in his music let us try to understand the essence of these features in general. In my opinion what characterizes the tragic spirit is the exact contrary of those qualities which we have applied to lyricism. If instead of love we put hatred and instead of attachment we say cruelty and contempt, we thus define the very premises of tragedy. Furthermore, whereas lyricism may expand in time and space and even endeavour to give the impression of avoiding an end altogether, tragedy demands absolute and definite limits, both temporal and spatial, in order to exist at all. Lyricism is escape, tragedy means confinement, worse, imprisonment. Instead of the expansion of lyricism, tragedy needs, above all, *economy*.

Dramatic facts cannot be considered as tragic ones. The picaresque novel or drama, in spite of all the horrors related in it, can never become tragedy. The *picado* who has committed a crime, however sombre, is not a tragic hero, because if his crime has been committed in Madrid, he may flee to Toledo. That is why tragedy's first exigency is a strict location in space. Even if caught and punished, the *picado* does not therefore become tragic, because the mere idea of punishment implies a moral background which is alien to tragedy. In this sense tragedy is amoral but crime and death are not mere accidents in it and it would be false to consider wars or catastrophes as tragic events. Both can be accidents, a war, if not an accident, always implies some sort of logical punishment. Yet tragedy is not illogical, on the contrary. Illogical, or rather arbitrary in its premises, it develops according to a logic which becomes fatal. Fatality is another main aspect of tragedy, not in the formal way of each cause leading to an effect,

but as a complete, predetermined law which rules all possible events.

Tragedy is by definition a vicious circle, and nobody perhaps has expressed it better than Thomas De Quincey in the following passage.

Referring to the 'fatal child, who was the Œdipus of tragedy' De Quincey says: 'It is singular that in all such cases, which are many, spread through classical literature, the parties menaced by fate believe the menace—else why do they seek to evade it; and yet believe it not—else why do they fancy themselves able to evade it?'¹

The ambiguity thus expressed gives us the key to the main problem of tragedy in general and to Webern's tragic spirit in particular. Its significance lies in the equilibrium which exists between the maximum of motion and total immobility. If Greek tragedy had implied only an absolute belief in the oracle's warnings, this complete *credo* would have meant total immobility. In fact, such an immobility exists, since from the very beginning of the play we know everything that is going to happen. And yet there is a play, which means that something actually happens, moves on. This is due to the fact that a partial doubt always exists concerning the absolute value of the oracle's warning. If it were only the shadow of a doubt, it is enough to explain the tremendous precautions that are taken to avoid the functioning of the fatal machinery. It is that which provokes motion.

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Before discussing this point more closely let us state that in the same way as Berg's lyricism achieves a connection with the past, Webern's tragic sense makes possible a projection into the future. Of course, in a sense Webern is as traditional an artist as Berg (we know that every genuine artist is, to a certain extent, a product of the past). The difference between the two is a matter of personal determination, a deliberate difference with regard to the handling of the traditional problems.

Instead of remaining attached to the past in a lyrical way, Webern discards it with tragic cruelty. From his very first work on the *Passacaglia* for orchestra, op. 1, his complete personality is presented to us. The *Passacaglia* begins with a short and plastic theme of eight bars. In each bar there is a crotchet on the first

¹De Quincey. 'The Theban Sphinx' in *Historical Essays*.

beat, the sounds are: D, C sharp, B flat, A flat, F, E, A natural, D. In its structure it carries Schönberg's lesson in absolute economy, maximum of logic in spite of maximum of variety, to its utmost consequences.

The tonality is D minor, which explains the repetition of the sound D, while no other sound is repeated. Furthermore, the melodic structure shows the following particularity: the second motif (sounds 4 to 6) is the crab inversion of the first (sounds 1 to 3), which means that, in spite of their difference, they have a common source. This particularity is the result of absolute economy and logic of thought, while the maximum of variety is obtained by the following elements: in the first place the harmony of the theme uses, from beginning to end, different functions, and in the second place all the sounds of the chromatic scale, except the B natural, are used in it.

What is even more revealing is the fact that the melodic structure of the theme is very characteristic of many Webern themes. The two motives to which I have referred can be found in practically every one of Webern's scores. In one of his posthumous (and very last) works, the *Variations for Orchestra*, op. 30, the basic twelve-tone series is built entirely on the same intervals. In this sense there is no development in Webern's career; or, rather, the considerable evolution which determines this career is one of oracular logic.

The lack of development which characterizes Webern's music can be demonstrated in yet another way. For his first work Berg chose the sonata form in which thematic elaboration is a *conditio sine qua non*; Webern, on the other hand, by choosing the passacaglia form, fundamentally excludes the mere idea of such a process of composition. The initial thematic idea is continuously stated throughout the whole score, giving birth to a continuous series of new variations, yet every new section, however organically linked with the preceding ones, is never a development of previously used material. We find similar treatments of form in every one of Webern's works, whose evolution shows an incessant approach towards the idea of Schönberg's most radical concept: *perpetual variation*.

The lack of development implies the composer's contempt (and even cruelty) as far as his themes are concerned. These tragic qualities have at one time led Webern to write the shortest pieces

that have ever been composed during the whole of musical history. Their significance is a primary one: their very shortness makes it possible to avoid even the slightest repetition, even the faintest allusion to a development as such. In these, the boldest outbursts of contempt of what had until then been considered one of the fundamental compositional devices, musical hatred almost becomes hatred of music and the art of tragedy risks becoming the tragedy of art.

Such is the spirit which accounts for the series of amazing works composed by Webern between 1910 and 1914. The *Five Movements* for string quartet, op. 5, the *Six Pieces* for orchestra, op. 6, *Four Pieces* for violin and piano, op. 7, the *Two Songs* for voice and chamber orchestra, op. 8, the *Bagatelles* for string quartet, op. 9, the *Five Pieces* for orchestra, op. 10, and the *Three Small Pieces* for 'cello and piano, op. 11, seem to defy the very idea of time itself. None of these pieces exceeds the duration of a minute or two, some of them last only a few seconds.

Was the maximum of variety, the highest degree of tension and the utmost richness of imagination to cause ruin and death and to be the last breath of musical art?

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What saved Webern was his sense of tradition. If perpetual variation was Schönberg's greatest acquisition and thereby the greatest acquisition of modern polyphony, then the 'normal' process of musical composition had to be re-established to its full rights. Does such a resolution mean the capitulation of the tragic spirit? Not at all. Perpetual variation, when completely achieved—and that is what Webern set out to do—is the exact musical equivalent to the fundamental ambiguity of tragedy as expressed by De Quincey. It implies the equilibrium between motion and immobility, the rigidity of the oracle's warning and the elasticity of the attempts to evade it, the arbitrary premises of the given initial inspiration and the uncompromising logic, the pre-determined and ruthless law, which rule the totality of events.

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The path that led Webern to the re-establishment of traditional means of composition was a long and difficult one—1914-1923, nine years during which only five works were composed. They

are all song-cycles and all (except one which is written for voice and piano) give the voice instrumental backgrounds of the most varied types. Some cycles use a chamber orchestra, others only a few instruments. The general tendency is towards broader lines than before and to a complex polyphony based mainly on contrapuntal devices. The opus numbers are 12 to 16. In the concluding piece, op. 15, we find a work which is a double canon in contrary motion; the whole of op. 16 is a series of canons of different forms for voice, clarinet and bass-clarinet.

Webern's traditional and contrapuntal efforts thus lead him to the adoption for his own purposes of the most traditional of contrapuntal forms: the canon. The high spirit of economy expressed in this coincides with Schönberg's discovery and formulation of the twelve-tone technique. Webern immediately adopted it, his own efforts having in the meantime brought him very closely to the problems already solved by his master.

Two more song-cycles, op. 17 and op. 18, the first being scored for violin, clarinet and bass-clarinet, the second for piccolo-clarinet and guitar, try out the possibilities of the new technique while prolonging the general preoccupations of the preceding works. Then follow *Two Pieces* for chorus, celesta, guitar, violin, clarinet and bass-clarinet, op. 19, and finally the first purely instrumental work since 1914, the *String Trio*, op. 20 (1927).

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Length as such is a relative idea, it is, however, one of the dimensions of music. Musical pieces may be short or long, and the solution of writing short pieces could thus only be provisional. And yet it was a solution because the suspension of the classical tonal functions had, at the time, deprived musical composition of one of its fundamental means of achieving vast forms. To write short pieces obviously became the most radical and appropriate way to express oneself in the new idiom. Here again Webern's attitude was one of utmost consequence with regard to Schönberg's tuition. However, if vast forms were becoming possible again, thanks to the twelve-tone technique, it also became evident that they had to be re-established as one of the principal aspects of musical composition.

Schönberg first started out on this road with the help of classical forms. So does Webern in his *String Trio*, the two movements of which are composed in Rondo and Sonata form; but

from then on we enter the period of his last works, in which the projection into the future of certain Schönbergian elements becomes complete.

These last works go from op. 21 to op. 31 (and possibly one or two other unfinished ones). They are a symphony and a concerto for chamber orchestra (opp. 21 and 24), two quartets, one for violin, clarinet, tenor-saxophone and piano (op. 22) and the other one for strings (op. 28), two song-cycles with piano accompaniment (opp. 23 and 25), piano variations (op. 27), orchestral variations (op. 31), and three choral works with orchestra, *Das Augenlicht* (op. 26), first and second cantatas (opp. 29 and 31).

Until this last period one could say, with a slight exaggeration, that every one of Webern's works could have been written by his master. From now on Webern's personality becomes so original that it is not surprising that the vast majority of musicians and music lovers have so far completely failed to understand it.

Let us go through the chief characteristics of this astounding series of scores. What appears to be their most striking feature is that, in every respect, they carry Schönberg's contributions and acquisitions to a point which is beyond the limits of Schönberg's activity itself. Any one of these contributions, whether counterpoint, free instrumental combinations or the concept of perpetual variation, are used in a way unheard of before. Let us, for instance, take the latter. By formulating the laws of the twelve-tone technique, Schönberg has given to this concept a fundamental and technical incarnation. But by clinging most of the time to classical forms Schönberg's idea of perpetual variation bears with it a superstructure which deprives it of the possibility of fulfilling all its implications. Webern's attitude is more radical. His forms are created by the very handling of the new technique, by the strict use of the concept of perpetual variation as such.

The essentially tragic equilibrium between motion and immobility is thus, as we know, completely achieved. Here are some of its most striking purely compositional aspects: the *Spiegelbild*—exact rhythmical, harmonic and melodic retrograde motion, during which, in spite of an absolute symmetry of all the features used, the result is a complete change of sound. It includes the shifting of identical or similar motives and chords to different beats, which means complete rhythmical identity combined with

complete rhythmical variation. One could define such a procedure as 'asymmetrical symmetry'. A simple example will make this clear.

Let us take the series of figures 1 3 5 7 5 3 1.

The first part of the series is 1 3 5 7: 7 is the turning point from where the retrograde motion (second part) begins. Nothing could be more symmetrical, yet (especially when transposed into actual sounds) nothing could at the same time be more asymmetrical. Everything is changed in the second part in relation to the first: what was at the beginning is now at the end, what was 'after' is now 'before', what was 'small' is now 'big', and so on. This most radical solution of complete change means motion, but given the oracle-like rigidity of the proposition and the logic of the law of its elaboration, absolute immobility is implied as well.

A similar and possibly even more striking musical equivalent of the same tragic ambiguity can be found in another incarnation of the concept of perpetual variation. In order to understand it we must first make absolutely clear the two following points.

(1) Let us bear in mind that the stronger the impact of the initial proposition (the oracle if you like) on all the further elaborations, the more these elaborations become perpetual variations of the original proposition.

(2) The twelve-tone technique is merely an *instrument* of composition. As such it does not guarantee any particular musical 'style'. Tonal music, as well as suspension of the tonal functions, may be achieved through the use of the twelve-tone technique. However, let us not forget that this technique was created at a time when it became necessary to make up for the 'gaps' which were caused by the abandon of tonal functions, and thus its deepest implication is an entirely new idiom which transcends the very concept of tonality. Such is Schönberg's most radical aspect, but it becomes necessary to add now that Schönberg himself has never quite achieved—and has never really wanted to achieve—the complete reign of such a state of affairs.

Once more it has been Webern's task to draw the furthest conclusions of his master's propositions. Consciously, deliberately, he sets out to transcend the last vestige of tonality. Where Schönberg is found to hesitate, where Berg tries to connect his master's acquisitions with the functions of past idiom, Webern abandons the past with his habitual cruelty and contempt and

begins a dream of an undreamt-of land of dreams. And look, the dream becomes reality; even the technical premises are discovered so that the dreams may come true. What are they? The answer is simple.

If tonality is to be transcended, then one must avoid any sound from acquiring a privileged function. The twelve-tone technique, by putting all the sounds of the chromatic scale on the same plane, indicates such a solution. Yet remote elements of the former idiom may survive even in the new technique: harmonic or counter-puntal octaves, or even 'false-octave-relationships' (the term is mine) between different melodic lines. Such tonal 'archaisms' are habitually avoided by Webern. In that respect the most radical passages can be found in his *String Quartet*, op. 28. The beginning of the scherzo for instance is built on the perpetual variation of a certain amount of given motives, every one of which appears continuously in the same register, so that the whole passage can be considered as one single twelve-tone chord, held throughout with complete immobility, while alternative fractions of it are projected into motion.

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Our examination of Webern's attitude and works, even though superficial and incomplete, may promote, however, an understanding of some of the essential problems of contemporary musical art, a first approximation of which I endeavoured to give in my preceding article. We are now in a position to realize the exact traditional situation of the musical idiom of today. Schönberg has given it its actual foundation, Berg has not only made its links with the past clear and explicit, he has also completed it by giving it two works in one of the main traditional 'genre', his two operas *Wozzek* and *Lulu*. But tradition must go on, continue to live, and it has been Webern's task to indicate the road on which it must now travel. Webern's dream must become reality, the elements of this dream must become the objects of awareness; they will become the very cause of the awakening to authentic composition by any true musician.

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Once more let us use our analogies with tragedy: Webern's life itself was one of complete immobility blended with the most fantastic activity, i.e. motion. He has hardly ever left his own

country, his own home. No artist could be more modest, more pure, less concerned with the agitation of the outer world, but at the same time he never ceased to work at his own music or to defend the works of others, and no artist could be more fanatical in his striving towards truth and perfection. In the last years of his life his literary preoccupations led him to Hölderlin and to Greek tragedies (is it a pure coincidence?); quoting Hölderlin, whose translation of Sophocles' *Œdipus* he was reading, he wrote to a friend 'Leben heisst eine Form verteidigen' (to live means to defend a form), and that is what he had done all his life, nothing but that, but, by doing it, had done more than anyone else.

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On 15 September 1945 a soldier who had come many thousands of miles and who had never heard of Anton Webern fired a shot and killed him.

SELECTED NOTICES

Chinese Poems. Translated by Arthur Waley. Allen & Unwin, 8s. 6d.

IT is necessary to insist that Arthur Waley is one of our few significant poets. The translation of verse is a craft for which few have a proper respect. So many books of selections from this and that poet, from this and that language, are being published at present, and yet most readers of taste would dismiss the whole output with the summary verdict that translated verse is, at best, a crib helpful to those with but a slight knowledge of the original language, at worst a donnish exercise in cliché and mechanical rhyme. It is true that an occasional piece, usually by a poet in his own right, stands out, Flecker's rendering of the Spanish ballad of Count Arnaldos, for instance, Spender's 'Orpheus, Euridice, Hermes' from Rilke's *Neue Gedichte*, or Vernon Watkins' fragments of Hölderlin; but the great bulk of work fails, and most often from one principal cause: the translator's desire to imitate the metres and rhyme schemes of the original as faithfully as possible, even at the expense of syntactical obscurity, perverted word order, rhythms unnatural to English, padding for the sake of rhymes and stock poetic cliché. The resulting English version tends to blur the poet's imagery and to emerge as a product lacking all original virtue, and it is skipped at sight by discerning readers of magazines and miscellanies. True, the addition of half-rhymes to our translator's repertory has somewhat eased his task, and even within the constricting conditions I have outlined there are occasional outstanding successes—Professor Bowra's rendering of Pushkin's *Exegi monumentum* is one; but the bulk of contemporary work fails through being neither a poem that can be read independently of its original nor a literal crib for the benefit of the reader with a little knowledge of the language translated from.

From all these faults Mr. Waley is triumphantly free; for he not only writes poems of real virtue, but his flexible unrhymed medium is capable of rendering the individuality of the various Chinese poets he selects. There he is vastly the superior of the average contemporary translator into French, who has adopted a loose form of free verse suitable for all purposes, and translates into it any poet from Góngora to Dylan Thomas in such a way that his victims are often indistinguishable one from another.

Mr. Waley's book, which contains the bulk of his Chinese poems from his four previous collections, starts off with some folk-songs from *The Book of Songs*, all dating from the seventh century B.C. or earlier. These he had given up as untranslatable in his introduction to *The Temple*, for everything depends on the music; yet even here he scores his successes.

Plop fall the plums; but there are still seven.
Let those gentlemen that would court me
Come while it is lucky!

Plop fall the plums; there are still three.
Let any gentleman that would court me
Come before it is too late!

Plop fall the plums; in shallow baskets we lay them.
Any gentleman who would court me
Had better speak while there is time!

But it is with 'The Great Summons' that Mr. Waley first stands out as a major poet. The poem is an invocation to the soul of a dead or sick man, and dates from the second or third century B.C. It is slightly altered from the original version in *More Translations from the Chinese*, and now opens:

Green Spring receiveth
The vacant earth;
The white sun shineth;
Spring wind provoketh
To burst and burgeon
Each sprout and flower.
The dark ice melts and moves, fade not, my soul!
O Soul, come back again! O do not stray!

O Soul, come back again and go not East or West, or North or South!
For to the East a mighty water drowneth
Earth's other shore;
Tossed on its waves and heaving with its tides
The hornless Dragon of the Ocean rideth;
Clouds gather low and fogs enfold the sea
And gleaming ice drifts past.
O Soul, go not to the East,
To the silent Valley of Sunrise.

Mr. Waley uses a wide poetic vocabulary; and, unlike many modern translators, he is not afraid of archaisms, though the impatience with which he discards them when they serve no purpose can be seen by comparing the two versions of the 'Hymn to the Fallen', the first to be found under the title of 'Battle' as the first of the 170 *Chinese Poems*. But even finer than 'The Great Summons', because more of a piece, are 'Poverty' and the superb 'Bones of Chuang Tzu'. This last makes even better play with evocative monosyllables, and is the nearest approach to a romantic poem that will be found in the book. Here Mr. Waley is at his subtlest, and in his abrupt changes of rhythm, as the feeling of the poem alters, reaches a perfection attained only by T. S. Eliot, and occasionally by Edith Sitwell, among his contemporaries.

Then a wonder came; for out of the silence a voice—
Thin echo only, in no substance was the spirit seen—
Mysteriously answered, saying, 'I was a man of Sung,
Of the clan of Chuang; Chou was my name.
Beyond the climes of common thought
My reason soared, yet could I not save myself;
For at the last, when the long charter of my years was told,
I, too, for all my magic, by age was brought
To the Black Hill of Death!'

Then there is 'The Wangsun', a 'crafty creature, mean of size—Uncouth of form', and closely related to Mr. Robert Graves' clumsy hobgoblins; and scattered about this part of the book are touching and fragmentary complaints of absence, separation by reason of war, and abandonment. How much is packed into the six lines in which the wife of Liu Hsün laments her husband's defection:

Flap, flap, you curtain in front of our bed!
I hung you there to screen us from the light of day,
I brought you with me when I left my father's house;
Now I am taking you back with me again.
I will fold you up and lay you flat in your box.
Curtain—shall I ever take you out again?

In this version are many of the best poems of Po Chü-i, the major Chinese poet whose work takes up almost a third of the book. Apart from a single long piece, 'The Temple', remarkable for some fine descriptions but on the whole rather dull, his are mostly short lyrics, and he emerges from Mr. Waley's selection as a reflective poet, simple and occasionally sententious, with a deep feeling for natural beauty and a most engaging simplicity. His vein is chiefly elegiac, but by no means always so, as witness his indignant satire against militarism, 'The Old Man with the Broken Arm'. His poems often arise from a chance memory or are prompted by the seasons, and in rendering them Mr. Waley is far from the romantic vein in which he wrote 'The Bones of Chuang Tzu'. A typical piece is 'The Cranes':

The western wind has blown but a few days;
 Yet the first leaf already flies from the bough.
 On the drying paths I walk in my thin shoes;
 In the first cold I have donned my quilted coat.
 Through shallow ditches the floods are clearing away;
 Through sparse bamboos trickles a slanting light.
 In the early dark, down an alley of green moss,
 The garden boy is leading the cranes home.

The pieces in this collection were translated by Mr. Waley over many years, and they display different levels of accomplishment. Some of the flatter renderings in the early collections have been discarded, and some changes, always for the better, made in the pieces reprinted. The book contains also a few new translations. That Mr. Waley is a scholar is evident from his notes and from the introductions to his earlier books; that he is a poet is clear from every page of this collection. His mastery of unrhymed verse is best compared with Edith Sitwell's, and it is to her that the book is, most fittingly, dedicated. Miss Sitwell makes use of a long measure, while Mr. Waley, influenced by Hopkins' theories of sprung rhythm, limits himself to a line with a single break, and most often end-stopped. Miss Sitwell resorts to rhyme and assonance; Mr. Waley, to rhyme never and to assonance not often. The Chinese poets limit him to a sparer use of metaphor than Miss Sitwell's, and their imagery is for the most part confined to the visual, yet there are moments when his verse takes wings in a way that recalls 'The Song of the Cold':

While his love lasts he is distant as the stars;
 She is a sun-flower, looking up to the sun.
 Soon their love will be severed more than water from fire;
 A hundred evils will be heaped upon her.
 Her fate will follow the year's changes;
 Her lord will find new pleasures.

This review is no hurried tribute to this great writer; it is the fruit of more than twenty years' reading and re-reading of the poems, and of the greatest enjoyment of his prose translations. Occasionally during this time original poems of Mr. Waley's have appeared in periodicals; occasionally, too, there have been pieces printed over a pseudonym, that could be by no other hand. To judge by that remarkable piece, 'No Discharge', which appeared in the *New Statesman* in July 1941, Mr. Waley is a satirist with an individual and ironic detachment, and we must hope that he will one day publish a collection of his original work.

But such a book would do no more than confirm what we know already from his translations: that he is one of the best poets writing in English today, as well as the interpreter through whom we know so much as we do of Chinese philosophy and literature. How deeply he understands Taoist thought is clear from the notes on his limpid rendering of *The Way and the Power*, and his translation of that rumbustious religious allegory *Monkey* is a joy from beginning to end. In fact, our debt to him is two-fold, as poet and as scholar, and it is no small one.

Of the production of this book it is difficult to speak fairly. No doubt only the paper shortage compelled the publisher to crowd so much onto his page, and by this congestion to set the typographer so awkward a task. To keep the margins even, the poems are indented to varying degrees, but where as many as three pieces appear on a page the irregularities tend to fidget the reader's eye, and this in a book of such excellence is a pity.

J. M. COHEN

'ANDRÉ BRETON A-T-IL DIT PASSE'

Fata Morgana. Sur, Buenos Aires, 1942.

Arcane 17. Brentano's, New York, 1944.

Jeunes Cériseurs Garantis contre les Lièvres. View, New York, 1946.

FOR some ten years now surrealism has been in a state of crisis. The evidence of this has been the hither and thither of its personnel and a certain lack of development. In itself such a situation would not constitute much of a problem to a movement like surrealism. Indeed, as Nicolas Calas at first endeavoured to show, this might be the sign of a further growth to come, might be, that is, a period of preparation to confront certain tendencies outside but relevant to surrealism, the *Gestalt* theory, for example. Calas was correct, therefore, to expect a Third Manifesto which would clarify the issues and surmount the crisis. Breton, when he arrived in New York one winter's day six years back, confirmed this and by early summer the following year had written the *Prolegomènes à un Troisième Manifeste du Surréalisme ou Non*. It is a little disconcerting that the manifesto itself has still not been issued. It is more than disconcerting that Breton should now pronounce only equivocations on those issues where his associates disagree.

Meanwhile, however, Breton has published some remarkable poetry: *Fata Morgana* written in 1940, *Pleine Marge* of a little earlier, and some shorter poems written more recently and included in the volume *Jeunes Cériseurs Garantis contre les Lièvres*; and he has issued some extremely interesting prose: *Arcane 17*, written under the alchemical significations of Isis, and the critical fragments collected along with the new edition of *Le Surréalisme et la Peinture*.

The most casual examination of these works reveals Breton's increasing preoccupation with mythic as opposed to dream symbols. It is possible to be even more precise. These works demonstrate his profound relations with all that can be called *hermetic*. Indeed his titles indicate quite plainly the direction in which he is moving. *Arcane 17* refers to the seventeenth trump of the Tarot pack which may be interpreted as one of the aspects of Isis. This is further strengthened by the use of certain other cards of the Tarot pack as illustrations to the book, while throughout one section, Breton repeats, after Eliphas Levi who was Hugo's master in magic, as a chorus, 'Osiris est un dieu noir'. It is interesting to note that a book, not very popular with those who profess to be surrealists in England, John Layard's *Lady of the Hare*, indicates a connection between Osiris and the hare from which the strangeness of Breton's title to the selection of his poems published by *View*, may derive. Breton uses images with sufficient care and information not to have arrived at this by accident. In *Arcane 17* he traces the connection between alchemy and poetry, citing the

relations between Hugo and Fabre d'Olivet, Nerval's sonnets referring to Pythagoras and Swedenborg, Baudelaire's *correspondances* taken from the occultists, the nature of Rimbaud's reading at the height of his power, and Apollinaire's debts to the Cabala and to the Arthurian Cycle.

The poem *Pleine Marge* begins with the words: 'Je ne suis pas pour les adeptes ...' but it ends with an invocation none but the adepts may appreciate, calling upon the names of Pelagius, Joachim of Flora, Meister Eckhardt, Jansen, the Deacon Paris, the strange girl, seduced by a Jesuit, who was named Cadière, and finally Messieurs Bonjour who are not, surely, unrelated to Baron Samedi. This poem is dedicated to Pierre Mabille who lately has written, 'Dans la découverte, quelle qu'elle soit, que ce soit science, art, amour, le combat d'homme est semblable, l'atmosphère dangereuse identique. Ce sont les mécanismes d'invention et de prophétie qui opèrent, ceux de la tradition d'évocation magique.'

To appreciate Breton's present tendency it is necessary to understand the Egyptian and Chaldean symbols he has used with all their alchemical, magic and heretical significations. In his poetry this marks a change, and at the same time measures the shortcomings of his theoretical considerations in so far as these latter fail to account for what is conscious in his poetry by their reference to automatism. Freud is reported to have said that what interested him about the surrealists was not their unconscious but their conscious. This is more than relevant today. Whatever theory of the unconscious one cares to adopt, and it cannot be denied that the number of such theories is embarrassing, the work of art, the poem, must be finally judged upon the ideas it expresses and upon the means it employs to express them.

Breton has insisted that surrealism is a moral movement. Moral questions are consciously formulated and tested. Thus when Breton speaks, as he does in the note for Enrico Donati's exhibition, of the fear of liberty and in close proximity to references to 'bad faith' too, he challenges comparison with existentialism. It is not enough to refer to the 'fear of liberty' without showing why this fear may exist. This Breton cannot do, though in all his work there are to be found penetrating comments that illumine the problem from within, because he is tied to automatism. Consequently he is bound to a theory of unconscious motivation which can have no place in questions of a moral nature. Also, he is forced, in the interests of his group, to cling to certain equivocations. An example of these equivocations is his refusal to cast his vote either way in the debate within surrealism upon 'deux systèmes de figurations: l'un qui entend garder le contact direct avec le monde extérieur et, à quelque bouleversement qu'il le soumette, y prend manifestement ses repères, l'autre qui rompt avec toutes les apparences au moins immédiates, à la limite prétend s'affranchir même de la soumission à l'espace conventionnel et exige du tableau qu'il tire sa vertu objective de soi seul'.

Breton is unable, except by clever rhetoric, to offer any reason for not casting his vote. He says that these two tendencies have always existed, pulling painting first towards one and then to the other, and so will continue to do, likening them to the nominalist and realist positions upon universals and, without making it clear which is which, to the oriental and occidental modes of beholding. André Masson, too serious an artist to accept such a refusal to

solve the problem, passed out of the surrealist movement and placed himself alongside the existentialists. In an essay published by HORIZON with the title *A Crisis of the Imaginary*, this painter points out that Sartre has proved irrefutably in his work on the Imaginary that a picture must relate to the imaginary. The question as Breton's friends have argued it is therefore completely misunderstood. The only reality a picture can have is the reality of the materials which compose it while it must necessarily express what is unreal, appeal to the imagination of whoever looks at it.

Similarly, Sartre has posed the question of liberty in such a way as to lead one to expect to find some who feared liberty. He has done this by referring liberty to the alternatives of love and sexual desire. These two alternatives approximate to the sado-masochist tendencies and both are frustrating, and because Sartre has kept the problem as one of conscious intention it has remained a moral question. Breton, with his theory of the unconscious, can only make revealing comments but cannot advance towards a solution.

It is the most bitter comment upon Breton's position today that on the question of liberty and love he should be shown unable to develop. The *View* collection of his poems has a cover by Marcel Duchamp which puts Breton's face upon the Statue of Liberty. This is revealing. The rays forming a halo to the statue now surround Breton's head and the resulting image, created by a friend, constantly evokes the image many years earlier created by an enemy, the image by Picabia showing Breton with a crown of thorns. I would have this interpreted in the light of the ambivalence of love and hate which must come into play in any collective or group venture. Breton, himself, in *Amour Fou*, has endeavoured, interpreting Engels' *Origin of the Family*, to construct a morality of the relations between man and woman on the one level, and between the individual and the collectivity on another, which would be monogamy and which is to be found in the surrealist message.

The *View* collection includes the poem *Tournesol* (1922) which was analysed in *Amour Fou* and shown to prefigure accurately the meeting with, as she is celebrated in *Pleine Marge*:

Entre toutes cette reine de Byzance aux yeux passant si loin l'outremer
Que je ne me retrouve jamais dans le quartier des Halles où elle m'apparut
Sans qu'elle se multiplie à perte de vue dans les glaces des voitures des
marchandes de violettes.

For her had been written that exciting book of love poems *L'Air de l'Eau*, two of which are included in this *View* volume. About her, too, and dedicated to her, was *Fata Morgana* which is certainly, up to this date, Breton's greatest poem. What had been said in the very last lines of *L'Air de l'Eau*:

J'ai trouvé le secret
De t'aimer
Toujours pour la première fois

is confirmed in the later poem:

Et sans partage toutes les femmes de ce monde je les ai aimées momie d'ibis
Je les ai aimées pour t'aimer mon unique amour momie d'ibis.

At first, reading *Arcane* 17, one thinks one perceives the final apotheosis of

It is impossible to make a final judgement of Breton. He remains so great a poet that one pities him the more that compulsion to surround himself with disciples. This pity increases when one thinks that he who was once the centre of that wonderful group of the 'twenties should today be content to sit in the same cafés uttering the same exclusions and initiations to a very different group. Perhaps it is a desire not to be conscious of his situation that conditions so rigidly his attachment to the unconscious and his failure to appreciate all that his conscious can achieve.

De sa litière souillé de sang noir et d'or vers la lune elle aiguise une de ses
cornes à l'arbre enthousiaste du grief

En se lovant avec les langueurs effrayantes

Flattée

La Bête se lèche le sexe je n'ai rien dit.

TONI DEL RENZIO

European Witness. By Stephen Spender. Hamish Hamilton. 10s. 6d.

BECAUSE it is so intelligently readable one does not at first notice how very odd Mr. Spender's book is. As everyone knows by now, it tells how, shortly after the end of the war, he was sent on an official mission to Germany in order generally to see what survived of German intellectual life, and in particular to inquire into the state of German libraries. The course of this mission reads rather like the programme of a nineteenth-century symphonic poem—a kind of *Tod und Verklärung* with the addition of choral passages for the Control Commission; and its oddness can only be measured by reversing the roles.

Let us suppose that, in the first months of victory, a young German poet of high seriousness, an unwilling sceptic so far as party aims go, arrives in the West Country on a similar mission. His first thought is to find Mr. Edward Sackville-West who, after spending a year or two in a Great Portland Street cellar, is said to be living near Wimborne. At the same time he has to cross-examine the Principal of University College, Exeter, on a charge of reputed liberalism; make sure that the 50,000 books recently burned in Salisbury include any which refer to the former British Empire, to cricket, or the R.A.F.; and explore the ruins of Bournemouth in the hope of tracing the 'reliable' editor of a local paper which once published something disagreeable about Beaverbrook. His captured Lagonda does not work; huddled in manholes and attics, the people of the West Country seldom make an unexpected remark; G.H.Q. at Torquay is more interested in Devonshire cream than in libraries; each vista, intellectual, political, practical, is blocked by a vast negative. Our poet, during his search for Mr. Sackville-West, analyses *Simpson*. So it is true that the English nanny is responsible for the decadent idealism of the race. And then suddenly, by Priestley's grave, everything comes clear. He has the secret: If we all love each other more, none of this need ever happen again.

The *Tod*, in fact, of Mr. Spender's book is better than the *Verklärung*. He is an admirable descriptive writer, and his accounts of the physical aspect of Germany just after the end of the war are sharp and moving. 'Gleams of light fell on the cathedral which, being slightly damaged, looks like a worn Gothic tapestry of itself with bare patches in the roof through which one sees the canvas

structure.' In little pictures like that the lyric side of ruin is flashed on the page, and a sombre population—both English and German—scratches about helplessly, but vividly, in the broken cities. The aim of the book, however, is less expository than didactic:

'Today we are confronted with the choice between making a heaven or a hell of the world in which we live, and the whole of civilization will be bound by whichever fate we choose.'

'The only answer to this past and this present is a conscious, deliberate and wholly responsible determination to make our society walk in paths of light.'

These two excerpts are typical of the moral which Mr. Spender draws from what he has seen in Germany. And although, of course, there is a sense in which he is perfectly right, he is also unsatisfying. His symphonic poem clinches its point with the brass, the drums, and the great concluding cymbal; but it is a point addressed to the emotions. He is trying to enlarge and illustrate Aristotle's conception of an ethical purpose. We pursue it, he repeats, not for the sake of knowledge but in order to inform our actions. Yet the nature of the 'paths of light' in which we are to walk is never made clear. The absolute towards which we are to tend is barely indicated. Is it to be reached by social, or political, or individual action? And if so, of what kind?

It is worth insisting on an answer. Mr. Spender has never been content with 'pure' poetry; he has a sensitive social conscience; he occupies in European letters the place of a very good poet who is trying to be at the same time as good a citizen as possible. When he writes such a sentence as this: 'We have to admit, surely, that political freedom has been tolerable and welcome to us because we did not think that it confronted us with the direct responsibility of a choice between good and evil,' we are therefore entitled to ask, What do you mean by good and evil? A dim general idea of good and evil makes exactly the compost in which efficient ideas such as totalitarianism thrive. All the dejected, humiliated Germans whom Mr. Spender describes so well were walking in a path of light until they discovered that it had led them into a bomb-crater.

One's first thought, on reading these exhortations, is 'I'm sure I understand exactly what he means'; one's second is to take Mr. Spender's advice as an endorsement of one's own panacea for Europe. More parcels for Germany, a falling birthrate, no army, compulsory Greek, all one's favourite ruins taken over by the National Trust, higher income-tax, lower income-tax. Mr. Spender inhabits the country of apprehensive enthusiasm which has been colonized by almost all men of good will in this century who are neither religious thinkers nor social revolutionaries. But like the others he has left out of his inventory any mention of the constitution, the laws, the currency, the customs and language, of his society. Who, with his haunting picture of modern Germany before them, will dare take action on so vague a prospectus?

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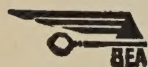
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